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University of Massachusetts Amherst

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MEN AND ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF MEN AND INTIMACY

A Dissertation Presented

By

STEVEN ALLEN BERMAN

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May 1985

School of Education

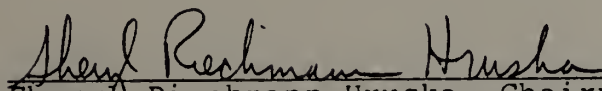
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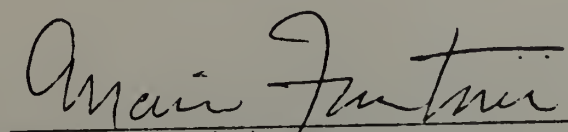
STEVEN ALLEN BERMAN

Approved as to style and content by:


Sheryl Riechmann-Hruska, Chairperson of Committee


Don Banks, Member


Howard Gadlin, Member


Mario Fantini, Dean
School of Education

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them here. But I again want to thank each one of them.
Their contribution to this study is inestimable.

ABSTRACT

MEN AND ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF MEN AND INTIMACY

May 1985

Steven Allen Berman, B.A., Colgate University
M.Ed., University of Massachusetts,
Ed.D., University of Massachusetts

Directed by: Professor Sheryl Riechmann-Hruska

The researcher presents and examines certain recurring psychological obstacles men encounter in long-term, love relationships. The issues of dependency, autonomy, anger, jealousy, infidelity, and the complex logistics of spouses finding time to be together are explored.

Using a qualitative research method based on three hundred tape-recorded interviews with heterosexual men, the researcher first defines these six recurring problematic and inter-related issues. He then offers psychotherapeutic stratagems for coping with them. The study acknowledges and relies on psychoanalytic and family systems theories in its elucidation of these various psychological obstacles. Adult developmental theory and an analysis of the mass media's effect on men's attitudes about marriage are also included.

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C H A P T E R I

INTRODUCTION

Scope and Purpose

This dissertation is a qualitative study of men and romantic relationships. The subject matter--specifically, the various psychological obstacles men encounter in intimate relationships with women--has been treated sparsely and superficially by what has come to be called "Pop Psychology." Even more meager have been studies conducted by serious researchers in the field (Berscheid and Fei, 1977). Scanning the literature, it is hard to find titles exclusively devoted to this subject. Occasional articles in periodicals and journals appear (e.g., Casler, 1969; Hattis, 1965; Pleck, 1974; Rubin, 1970). Chapters, too, in books, often books by and about women and romantic relationships (e.g., Friday, 1976; Lazarre, 1976), address themselves to the role of men in these relationships. But again, by and large, sustained, intensive research into this subject has been lacking.

The literature is populated with books and articles about marriage. Complex dyadic relationships are mapped or the psychology of women is examined. But the very specific psychological obstacles men confront in these sorts of relationships are rarely, if ever, adequately explored.

This dissertation is an initial qualitative contribution to the subject matter. The researcher suspects it will be useful to both professionals and laymen alike. Researchers presently studying the male gender will hopefully draw on the work. Hopefully, too, the dissertation will give inspiration and direction to further and much-needed related studies, studies focusing on marital and intimate relationships.

Daniel Levinson, whose research in the field of adult developmental psychology resulted in his writing Seasons of a Man's Life (1978), sees one of the tasks of a young man in his late teens and early twenties as learning "about his inner resources and vulnerabilities in relation to women, and about what they offer, demand, and withhold from him" (p. 26).

Levinson, however, like many professionals, states that for most men, especially young men, relationships are not their primary focus. Their thrust is "more towards mastering the external world than towards exploring the self" (p. 82). And he states, too, that for most men, and again especially for young men, love--that most elusive of words--is characterized by "impersonal pleasure seeking, macho power seeking or inhibition of passion and sexuality" (p. 107).

It is truly one of the great crises in our society, and of almost all societies, Dr. Levinson feels, that men have to choose and start a family before they know what it is they are up to. He states:

Most young men are not ready to make an enduring inner commitment to wife and family, and they are not capable of a highly loving, sexually free, and emotionally intimate relationship. (p. 10)

They need, therefore, to learn about these relationships. As Herb Goldberg, Professor of Psychology at California State University and author of The Hazards of Being Male (1976) further points out:

Marriage is condoned and sometimes even encouraged for a man in his early twenties--long before he has had the time to develop and grow emotionally, to leave adolescence, to define himself vocationally and philosophically, and to achieve a fairly secure economic foothold. (p. 26)

Given these premature expectations, it should come as no surprise that in California alone, more than seventy percent of all the divorces occur to people who are twenty-eight years old or younger.

Review of Existing Literature

Interestingly, several books by women about female psychology were instrumental to this study about men and romantic relationships; the entire design of the study being suggested by the writings of Irene Claremont de Castillejo, a celebrated Jungian analyst. In her book, Knowing Woman: A Feminine Psychology (1973) she speaks about the need for men to:

turn from the pleasant harmless 'persona' mask which one has so carefully cultivated and which one really believed one was, to find the elements of cruelty within oneself of which one had no idea (p. 51).

She speaks, too, of the new male hero, the man who will "explore the cold unpredictable half-light of his own feminine nature" (p. 51). This research study, a beginning attempt at mapping the recurring psychological obstacles that a sample of men reported in their romantic relationships, is, at least in part, a way of making more explicit Castillejo's suggestions to this "new male hero" (p. 51).

Castillejo, along with other women writers (Dinnerstein, 1977; Friday, 1977; Lazarre, 1978), states that men need to turn their gaze inward, to embrace their conflicts and self-doubts; conflicts and self-doubts often provoked in romantic relationships. In its simplest form, this study was designed to uncover some of what men would initially encounter in these psychological depths.

There is a slim body of literature on men and intimacy (Stearns, 1979). As Mark Gerzon (1982) confirms: "In our books and in our speech, we are quick to talk about sex and slow to discuss intimacy" (p. 4). "Pop-psychology," along with what has come to be called the literature on male liberation (Goldberg, 1976; Pleck and Sawyer, 1974) appeal for a greater emotionality among men. But many of these works, e.g., Farrel's Liberated Man (1976) and Fasteau's The Male Machine (1974) offer, for this researcher's tastes, too simple panaceas. It appears that a lot of what has been proposed for men vis-a-vis romantic relationships, often by women and male liberationists, has been a sort of idealized

womanhood or a plea for androgyny (Stearns, 1979).

The majority of serious research studies on men and romantic relationships center on men and marriage; these studies additionally focusing on the changing role for men in marital relationships (Goldberg, 1976; Stearns, 1979). Difficulties of bread-winning, problems of dealing with role changes of women, the friction between bread-winning demands and fatherhood have all been studied. But research specifically focusing on the psychological obstacles men encounter in romantic relationships is still in its infancy (Pleck and Sawyer, 1974).

In the process of defining and later fleshing out the specific psychological obstacles enumerated by the sample of men interviewed for this study, several researchers and clinicians aided in clarification. Each of the obstacles, to greater and lesser extents, previously had been examined; systems theorists, as well as psychoanalytic theorists addressing themselves to them. To this researcher's knowledge, however, none of these previous researchers employed a schemata consisting of these same six obstacles in discussing men and romantic relationships. (For a more complete explanation of how this study both compliments and augments previous research in this field, as well as further documentation regarding the paucity of existing literature on men and intimacy, see Chapter X of this dissertation.)

The chapter on the Extinction Obstacle owes much to Otto

Rank (1973) and Rollo May (1975). It was Rank who clearly delineated what he called the "Death Fear." This study's conceptualization of how this psychological obstacle operates for men in romantic relationships derives from his writings.

Rank's prose, occasionally burdened for this researcher with antiquated psychoanalytic terminology, was succinctly paraphrased by Rollo May (1975); May's condensation of Rank's ideas proving very helpful to understanding Rank's crucial ideas.

In the literature, the Extinction Obstacle is conceptualized as being an intrapsychic dynamic; hence, the preponderance of psychoanalytic thinkers this study relied upon to better understand it. Theodore Reik's writings, especially A Psychologist Looks at Love (1944) and Otto Kernberg's writings (1967) afforded useful insights. Kernberg's life-long work with so-called primitive personality disturbances, especially in the area of the borderline patient, addresses itself to optimal (as well as pathological) psychological development. Focusing on the inability of so-called borderline patients to create and sustain stable interpersonal relationships, his work was particularly helpful in suggesting speculations about the etiology of the Extinction Obstacle.

Margaret Mahler (1975), a pioneer in ego psychology and child development, was also useful in furthering this researcher's understanding of the Extinction Obstacle. Her

theory of the nature of the child's attachment to the mother (symbiosis) and the gradual breaking of this attachment (separation-individuation), one of the seminal contributions to psychoanalytic theory in recent years, afforded additional ideas about the earliest roots of men's problems with intimacy. Fears for men of being overwhelmed and abandoned by a female partner in a love relationship, Mahler suggests, reverberate from our very earliest interactions with our mothers.

Louise Kaplan's Oneness and Separateness: From Infant to Individual (1978) was also invaluable background material for this section of the study; Kaplan's writing essentially a layman's guide to Mahler's work.

The fiction of Marcel Proust, in particular Swann's Way (1928), also offered rich background material into the "dance of intimacy" and its attendant obstacles. Proust wrote especially perceptively about the early stages of a romantic relationship; the very terrain where the Extinction Obstacle can be most treacherous.

The Fusion Obstacle, the tendency in men to become increasingly dependent on women, has been examined by several systems theorists (Fogarty, 1979; Jackson, 1968; Minuchin, 1974). With their sensitivity to so-called "boundary issues," or the degree of permeability existing between various members of a family or a dyad, these researchers and clinicians attempted to atomize the oftentimes knotty inter-

personal dynamics of this obstacle. Minuchin's "structural" approach, because of its observations into the variety of dilemmas generated by overly-fused marital partners, was especially helpful, offering a cohesive theoretical framework in which to better understand these complex issues.

Christopher Lasch's The Culture of Narcissism (1979) afforded a broader perspective within which to place the Fusion Obstacle. Lasch, a cultural historian whose thinking relies heavily on the work of Heinz Kohut, one of the most important psychoanalytic theorists on the subject of narcissism, understands this Fusion Obstacle to be of epidemic proportions in the United States. His analysis of the cultural origins of the Fusion Obstacle allowed a departure from a sometimes limited psychological framework.

The clinical literature on both the Anger and the Jealousy Obstacles supplied the theoretical backbone for Chapters V and VI, especially the works of Don Jackson (1968) and Robert Seidenberg (1973). Both practicing psychiatrists (Jackson deceased), Jackson could be called a family therapist; Seidenberg, an orthodox psychoanalytic psychotherapist. Again, as with the Extinction Obstacle and the Fusion Obstacle, both schools of thought--systems thinking and psychoanalytic theory--contributed to the analysis of data.

Don Jackson, originally a part of the by now well-known Palo Alto group (including Gregory Bateson, Jay Haley, and

Paul Watzlawick) is focused in his writings on consistent patterns of interactions and how these patterns eventually become rules governing a marriage or a family. Jackson's insights into the habituated interactions vis-a-vis expressing anger in marital dyads illumined this researcher's thinking on the various indirect expressions of anger that men employ in their relationships with women (Jackson, 1968).

Robert Seidenberg (1973) offered an expanded perspective for this researcher's grapplings with the roles of anger and jealousy in romantic relationships. Rooted in psychoanalytic theory, Seidenberg embraces these painful issues as potentially redemptive; as a means of coming to terms with one's most difficult, developmentally-thwarted psychological issues. For Seidenberg, both obstacles, along with their concomitant emotional discomfort, have the possibility of propelling men and women into much needed processes of self-examination. Though Seidenberg's work did not always directly impact upon the analysis of data, his ideas about marriage were incorporated into this researcher's own personal ideas on the subject. Some of the latter sections of the study, sections only tangentially related to the analysis of data, were very obviously inspired by much of Seidenberg's thinking.

David Shapiro, a psychoanalytically trained clinician whose book Neurotic Styles (1965) explores four kinds of neuroses was helpful in his explanation of the psychoanalytic

concept of projection. Projection, "the attribution of objectionable motives, affects, or ideas of one's own to an external object" (p. 94) was crucial to this researcher in understanding how anger operates for men in romantic relationships.

Specific researchers whose work focused on jealousy and who aided in this study's conceptualizations about its jealousy-related data include Ellen Berscheid and Jack Fei (Clanton, 1977, p. 101), Larry Constantine (Clanton, 1977, p. 190), and Ronald Mazur (Clanton, 1977, p. 181). Berscheid and Fei bemoan how little the empirical sciences have to offer on the subject and then attempt some tentative conclusions regarding jealousy's relationships to personal insecurity; Constantine's research also focusing on the personal insecurities exacerbated by jealousy. Finally, Mazur posits a suggestive (rather than a definitive) typology of jealousy, offering descriptions of several forms of jealousy--Exclusion-jealousy, whereby an individual is left out of a critical experience of a loved one; Possessive-jealousy, the inability to create emotional space for a partner; Competition-jealousy, being jealous of a mate's achievements; and Fear-jealousy, a more generalized fear of losing someone special.

The Time Obstacle, or the tendency of marital partners to deprioritize their relationship (spending increasingly smaller amounts of time together) has been examined less

extensively in the literature. Don Jackson (1968) defined the problem, noting that:

a man tends to spend a lot of time with a woman in courtship But afterwards, he devotes a lot of time to his work, telling his wife it's for their mutual welfare (p. 95).

Beyond this brief mention of the problem, however, Jackson adds little clarification.

Herb Goldberg, author of The Hazards of Being Male (1976) addresses himself to this problem by addressing the problems of male careerism, the adrenalized ambitious urges men often grapple with in the workplace; these grapplings frequently impacting their romantic relationships. Goldberg, unfortunately, primarily focuses on the deleterious physical and psychological effects of a success-at-any-price careerism; his analysis, therefore, not accounting for the various and subtle gradations of the problem.

Daniel Levinson's seminal work in adult developmental psychology, The Season's of a Man's Life (1978), incisively touches upon this problem of careerism by examining its developmental "triggers." The stages of a man's life, characterized by Levinson as a continuous series of tasks to be negotiated, include the establishment of both a career and the solidification of a romantic relationship; these two tasks, Levinson stating, obviously and often being at odds with one another. Because Levinson's work attempts such a grand canvas--the life cycle itself--he sometimes too quickly, for this researcher's tastes; traverses problematic

areas; in this case, precisely how careerism undermines an intimate relationship. Drawing on data accumulated from three hundred face-to-face interviews with men, this researcher, very simply stated, attempted to expand on Levinson's findings.

From the data collected, the question regarding the Fidelity Obstacle that men continually wrestled with was, "How can a marriage or a romantic relationship not succumb to this obstacle, to the temptation to have extramarital affairs?" Anthony Pietropinto's Husbands and Wives (1981) offered useful statistics regarding this sort of formulation of the Fidelity Obstacle. He interviewed via questionnaire 3,880 individuals; his findings specifically shaping some of this study's thinking about when adulterous episodes are most likely to occur within a marriage.

The antidotes for the Fidelity Obstacle appearing in this study were derived from both the data (the insights of men who felt they had lost a relationship because of extramarital affairs) and the writings of Carl Rogers (1972); Roger's notions specifically about the sort of communication needed in a long-term relationship supplying clarity and inspiration. The skills he sees as necessary in forming an intimate partnership, he succinctly distilled into the following contractual statements:

I will risk myself by endeavoring to communicate any persisting feeling, positive or negative, to my partner--to the full depth that I understand it in myself--as a living, present part of me. Then I

will risk further by trying to understand, with all the empathy I can bring to bear, his or her response, whether it is accusatory and critical or sharing and self-revealing (p. 204).

Roger's belief in this process of intensive sharing--that it allows romantic relationships to deepen (rather than split asunder) and that it allows them to navigate the often tumultuous waters of the Fidelity Obstacle--informed much of this researcher's personal beliefs on the subject.

To reiterate: There are precious few studies specifically focusing on men vis-a-vis romantic relationships (Pleck and Sawyer, 1974; Stearns, 1979). Systems, psychoanalytic, adult development, and human potential theorists (Rogers), along with various books and articles spawned by the Women's and Men's Liberation Movements, all helped clarify and organize the data accumulated for this study. A complete bibliography, of course, appears at the end of this study.

C H A P T E R I I

METHOD

Design Overview for the Complete Study

I used a tripartite qualitative research method for this dissertation. The first component of the study's design consisted of seventy, two-hour, face-to-face, unstructured interviews. In this phase of the research, the researcher did not know in advance which questions were appropriate to ask, which questions to include or exclude. By this informal interviewing process, the researcher was attempting to create an "interview guide"--a series of relevant and meaningful questions that would prove helpful to him in focusing subsequent face-to-face interviews.

A general note about why the researcher used the face-to-face interview is now needed. Why was this the primary research tool? When a researcher is after information about another's personal life--when the data of a given research project are to be the very subjective first-person accounts of a group of individuals' private and personal lives (in this case, their sexual/romantic lives)--there is simply no better research tool than an interview. The reasons for this are to be found in the cultural expectations accompanying the word "interview." Dr. Howard Schwartz and Dr. Jerry Jacobs,

in their book, Qualitative Research (1979), make this point very clearly.¹

There are certain kinds of personal information that are ordinarily unavailable to almost everyone. There are things that strangers do not have a right to know, while intimates (who do have this right) frequently cannot be told because of the practical consequences that may ensue from telling them. A husband would ordinarily not tell a stranger that in addition to a wife he had a mistress on the side, and certainly he would not tell his wife. However, the "interviewer" constitutes a special kind of stranger in our society, one who can ask about many personal matters without being perceived as breaching another's right to privacy. This is especially true if a person perceives the interviewer to be someone who is socially unconnected to the information that he or she is seeking. In such cases, personal information can be given for two reasons. As an interviewer, he or she has the right to ask; and because the interviewer is a socially irrelevant person, the interviewee does not face the personal consequences of telling this information to a significant other. As a result, the interviewer, at least in some contexts, can ask almost anything, and, in turn, can be told almost anything he or she wants to know.

Face-to-face interviewing would, therefore, seem to be the perfect medium to use if one hoped to elicit personal accounts. It allows access to private information and gives the researcher some nominal control over the kind and amount of information he gets. (p. 63)

Having conducted my first round of face-to-face interviews (collecting the data with a tape recorder and transcribing all these interviews), I was then in a position to do some preliminary coding and categorizing of data. I will be describing this step in greater depth in the next section of the dissertation. For now, it is enough to mention that the interviews were collated according to dominant emotional themes. That is, I determined what each

of the seventy interviews was focusing on--what psychological issues my interviewees were discussing.

This process completed, I was then ready to commence the second major component of my research design; namely, two hundred and thirty two-hour, face-to-face structured interviews. Using my "interview guide," these interviews were more formally structured than my first series of seventy.

All these data collected (over six hundred hours of tape-recorded interviews), the final phase of my research could be launched: theory formulating.

I have chosen to represent my research modus operandi as consisting of three discrete phases. But in this sort of qualitative study, data collection, coding and categorizing of data, and developing theories all tend to occur simultaneously and to mutually support one another.

Because of the dearth of material written about men and romantic relationships, I selected the qualitative approach. Basically, I was attempting to establish some sort of descriptive definitions for the various psychological obstacles men encounter in their intimate relationships with women. It will be left to future researchers to further examine these tentatively demarcated areas.

Being a qualitative research study, my dissertation is not primarily concerned with discovering and verifying scientific hypotheses. Rather, I was more concerned with

reality reconstruction--"the tortuous business of learning to see the world of an individual or group from the inside" (Schwartz and Jacobs, 1979, p. 2). And beyond this, the dissertation has been designed to be a hypotheses-generating study, one that will serve as an intellectual springboard for future research.

Part I: Initial Interviews

Subjects. The first component was the establishing of some empirical structures or general patterns regarding men and romantic relationships. This was done through seventy, two-hour, unstructured interviews with men of all ages and socioeconomic backgrounds. My study focused on men in heterosexual relationships. A more detailed description of my sample follows:

Age: Slightly more than half of the men I interviewed were between the ages of twenty-six and thirty-seven. Approximately one-quarter of them were between the ages of thirty-seven and fifty-six. And men less than twenty-six and men over fifty-six comprised the remaining quarter of my sample. The bulk of my sample, then, consisted of men between the ages of twenty-six and thirty-seven.

Marital Status: Forty-five percent of the men interviewed were currently married. Twenty-five percent were presently involved in romantic

relationships. Of the remaining thirty percent, twenty percent had been divorced (the vast majority of them within the past seven years). The remaining ten percent were not currently involved in a romantic relationship.

Class: If annual income is the determinant to "class," seventy percent of my sample were "middle-class," that is, men making gross annual incomes between \$18,000 and \$40,000. Ten percent of the men I interviewed earned more than \$40,000 per year. The remaining twenty percent, of course, earned less than \$18,000 per year.

Race: Of the three hundred men I ended up interviewing, seventy-eight percent were Caucasian (of varying religious and ethnic backgrounds), fifteen percent were Black, seven percent Hispanic, and two percent Native American. Again, there was no intentional choice in my sampling.

Procedure. By "unstructured interview," I mean an interview where the questions were not decided upon in advance but which were asked spontaneously during the interview because they seemed relevant or important. In research parlance, this is a questioning sequence that is "recursively defined"; that is, the questions asked depended a great deal on what was already said in the interview. Given the intentions of my study--to reach some general

conclusions about the psychological obstacles men encounter in intimate relationships with women--this technique was appropriate. Had I been after more "scientific data" or testing of hypotheses (a near impossibility in this case, given how little prior research had been done in the field), it would have perhaps been wiser not to have my questions vary from interview to interview. That way, the answers given by my interviewees could have been more easily counted, categorized, or compared with each other. This more structured or "scientific" approach was used in the second round of interviews described later.

The vast majority of the initial seventy people interviewed and of the subsequent two hundred and thirty interviewees felt that a written contract (one that would insure their confidentiality) was superfluous. Nevertheless, the researcher drew up the contract which appears in Appendix B and had each participant sign it.

All the interviews that were conducted took place in the homes and work places of the participants. A tape recorder was used at each of these interviews. In certain instances, the researcher was granted permission to record the interview with the understanding that after the research was over, the tape would be sent back to the participant. Naturally, the researcher complied with these wishes.

The researcher felt that the use of a tape recorder would best allow him, especially in the initial seventy

unstructured interviews, to later retrieve the essential information needed from these interviews. Because the researcher was to use these initial interviews as a "data pool" from which to make tentative conclusions about men and romantic relationships, as well as to devise an "interview guide" for his second series of interviews, he needed to have these first interviews readily available. In addition, the use of the tape recorder allowed the researcher to concentrate on the interviews in a way that note-taking would have made impossible. And in unstructured interviews, this ability to fully concentrate on the interview is essential. The spontaneity demanded of the interviewer in these sorts of interactions would only be hindered by cumbersome note-taking procedures.

Again, at the initial unstructured interviews, the researcher had no formal questionnaires, no prepared questions. He would simply explain his intentions to his participants--to eventually write a study about men and romantic relationships--and then begin the interview, often with an innocuous, fact-finding question such as "How long have you been married?" or "Are you presently involved in an intimate relationship with a woman?"

My participants all knew about my study at least a week before our interview. I called each of them to see if they were interested in participating in the project. Usually, their names had been given to me by other people I had

already interviewed. In this way, my participant pool was built on the principle of geometrical progressions; one interviewee suggested several other people I might interview; that new group of interviewees then suggesting several more. This is called a "snow ball" sample. (My very first trial interviews were conducted with acquaintances. These initial respondents, in turn, suggested other potential participants. In this fashion, I very quickly moved beyond my personal web of friends and acquaintances.)

Having completed this first round of seventy unstructured interviews, I then transcribed them, carefully re-listening to each tape-recorded interview during the transcription process. Other researchers prefer a typist to do the sometimes arduous task of transcribing interviews. But in my own case, I found that re-listening to each interview sensitized me to the content of the interview in a way that just a typed transcription did not allow.

Analysis. My initial data collected, I was then in a position to do some preliminary analyzing of these data. Two research needs determined the form the analysis would take:

1. I knew I wanted to acquire a set of meaningful questions for future use (an "interview guide"), a set of questions that would help me enrich my research into the psychological obstacles men encounter in their intimate relationships with women.
2. To do this, I had to first determine from my preliminary data what some of these obstacles were. I had to draw some general conclusions, some tentative descriptive definitions, in other words, about the nature of these psychological obstacles.

This process is known as "the search for patterns." It is the researcher's attempt to impose some normative standards on a body of data, some general statements, abstract categories, or sets of ideas that will help organize, illumine, and/or structure a large body of data. Quantitative researchers assign numbers to these sorts of qualitative observations, while qualitative researchers rely on natural language in the reporting of data and their more generalized observations. As Dr. Howard Schwartz (1979), however, prudently admonishes, these sorts of "systematic and parsimonious explanations are never easy to come by" (p. 10).

In order to code and index my initial seventy interviews, I first labelled each interview by the dominant psychological theme of its content. That is, after listening to each interview, I would immediately ask myself (with the aid of several area psychologists, psychotherapists and a University of Massachusetts School of Education faculty member) the very simple questions: "What is the majority of this interview about? What psychological issues are the central themes of this interview?" Qualitative research is, perforce, a combination of armchair speculation and naturalistic observation. This was, then, the "armchair speculation" component of my study.

Words like "jealousy," "anger," "monogamy," "extra-marital affairs," "resentment," "fear of intimacy," all emerged during this speculative component of my research.

These sorts of descriptive catch-words are what is known, in qualitative research, as "sensitizing concepts" (Schwartz and Jacobs, 1979, p. 84), tools to help organize data.

Cataloguing and counting the recurrence of these various sensitizing concepts (as they appeared in the seventy interviews) eventually yielded my first and very tentative general statements about men and the psychological obstacles they encounter in intimate relationships with women.

These first and general statements were refined several times even in the course of this stage of my research. Basically, though, what was slowly emerging was the existence of a number of major psychological obstacles that all the men I interviewed, to varying degrees of intensity and self-awareness, experienced in their romantic relationships with women. This refining process, to further elucidate, essentially took the form of weeding out overlapping "sensitizing concepts." Sensitizing concepts such as "rage" and "resentment," for example, could both be easily subsumed under the much broader concept, "anger." This was basically a trial-and-error procedure, one conducted with considerable input from colleagues and faculty members.

Results. Again, these first statements about the various obstacles needed refining. And refinement came in the form of my labeling the obstacles. Initially, I felt there were eleven relatively discrete obstacles (i.e., disenchantment with previous romantic relationships, jealousy, waning of

partner's physical attractiveness, lack of desire to eventually assume role of fatherhood, anger, the complicated logistics of finding time to be together, the fear of becoming overly-dependent, careerism, loss of autonomy, the fear of being taken advantage of in a romantic relationship, and the fear of a mate coupling with another man). Later on, after realizing that many of my initially demarcated obstacles overlapped, I readjusted their number to eight (i.e., jealousy, anger, the complicated logistics of finding time to be together, the fear of becoming overly-dependent, careerism, waning of partner's physical attractiveness, loss of autonomy, and the complications of eventually assuming the roles attendant to fatherhood). In the end, I settled on the number six. I felt comfortable that these six obstacles adequately covered the various psychological/emotional themes of the interviews. They were inter-related but discrete enough to be identified as separate areas of psychological/emotional difficulty.

It remained for the second major component of my research--namely, two hundred and thirty structured interviews--to test these tentative conclusions. Further, I wanted to more precisely define these psychological obstacles; to define them descriptively, operationally, and if possible, in a way that would include non-simplistic curative prescriptions for befriending and eventually conquering them.

The Obstacles

Having interviewed and tentatively analyzed my first series of seventy interviews, I was now in a position to posit some general conclusions, some "hunches" about the psychological obstacles men encounter in their intimate relationships with women. I was looking, then, for the broadest categories of obstacles.

My construction of the six most frequent obstacles I encountered in the course of my research were:

1. The fear men have of losing their independence in a close relationship. This obstacle is very closely related to:
2. The fear men have of too desperately needing a woman. As men become more deeply involved in intimate relationships with women, they fear this sort of psychological desperation and neediness.
3. Many of the men I interviewed saw their anger (at their mates) as the most powerful obstacle to maintaining intimate relationships with women.
4. Others saw jealousy as their nemesis.
5. Many men, too, felt they could not devote significant amounts of time to their intimate relationships with women. Time, they said, was a major obstacle. Devoting their "best" time to their careers, they were unable to nurture an intimate relationship.
6. And finally, the issue of fidelity was seen to be a major obstacle for men in both creating and sustaining intimate relationships with women.

These six tentative obstacles, I want to make clear, are not presented in any statistical or developmental fashion. That is, they have not been listed hierarchically; nor have they been presented as a series, as an unfolding "obstacle

course" that all men necessarily traverse in the same order. From my research at this point, it did tentatively appear, however, that all men--at some point in their intimate relationships with women--do encounter each of these obstacles.

To reiterate: The definition of these six obstacles were derived from analyzing first-person, personal accounts of seventy men. The definitions come from an analysis of the subjective interpretations of individuals about the events of their lives; these subjective accounts being the data of my research. All of these accounts were presented orally and in face-to-face interactions.

Given this research method and given the fact that it was the most appropriate method available, the fact remains that it is contingent upon the internal consistency and "integrity" of the accounts offered by the interviewees. Like all methods, it is flawed and this is precisely its major, but not insurmountable, flaw. How, for example, can a researcher really know if the interviewee is portraying his subjective experience genuinely (or if the researcher himself is interpreting without biases)? Can it be possible that for some ulterior motive, unbeknownst to the interviewer, his interviewee is wildly fabricating an inaccurate picture of his life? Fortunately, what makes this unpredictable factor not so unwieldy for the researcher is the fact that verbal and non-verbal feedback exists in the face-to-face

interaction. This allows the interviewer to at least subjectively evaluate the veracity of his interviewee's material. And again, it is important to remember that this study was not using "objective" reality for its data pool. It was the subjective accounts of men's lives that were the basis of this study, accounts that were then to be interpreted by the author. So, if a man, say, spoke about torrents of anger he experienced in his relationship with a woman and it, in fact, turned out that others claimed there to be no anger issuing from this man during the relationship under discussion, this would not be germane to this particular study. Subjective accounts (even if they did not resonate with some external and more objective reality) were the bedrock data upon which this research project relied.

An additional caveat is now appropriate. This "obstacle schemata" of six seemingly distinct obstacles as a tool for making romantic relationships more understandable for men (and, therefore, more navigable), is, simple, straightforward and seemingly very useful. But it is important to note that by making each of these obstacles a separate entity--by reifying them into intellectual concepts--I do not want to misrepresent their often inextricable nature. These obstacles, in other words, all live, as it were, in the same lair, and when they surface, it is sometimes as one entwined mass. Nevertheless, conceptualizing about them as mutually exclusive phenomena proves productive and useful in

organizing the data.

The Interview Guide

In terms of my research design, having tentatively enumerated to myself the six most common obstacles men experience in their intimate relationships with women, I could then devise my "interview guide," the set of questions I would be using to flesh-out these initial findings in all subsequent interviews (of which there were to be two hundred and thirty).

There are, according to Dr. Howard Schwartz and Dr. Jerry Jacobs (1979), basically three types of questions employed in an interview.

1. Questions decided upon in advance with fixed choices for answers.
2. Questions decided upon in advance which are "open ended" with respect to answers.
 - a. Questions of this type with provisions for future questioning or "probes" depending on the initial answer to the main questions.
3. Questions which are not decided upon in advance but which are asked spontaneously during the interview because they appear relevant or important. (pp. 44-45).

My first series of face-to-face interviews employed the third type of questions. My next series of interviews, however, were to be structured interviews; their structure to be imparted by "questions decided upon in advance which are 'open-ended' with respect to answers" or the second type above. These questions eventually comprised my "interview

guide."

Because I was interested in more than simply labeling the most common obstacles men experience in their intimate relationships with women, I needed to devise a series of questions that would aid more elaborate hypothesizing later on. I was after operational definitions; hence, I needed first-hand accounts of just how these obstacles operated in men's lives. I was searching, too, for possible curative antidotes for these obstacles. I needed first-hand accounts, therefore, of how men had successfully realized and then navigated these various obstacles. These two concerns, coupled to my desire to test out my first general conclusions about the obstacles themselves, determined the form of my "interview guide."

The questions in an interview guide need to be relevant to the topic the researcher hopes to learn about. They need to be phrased succinctly, unambiguously, and in such a way that the interviewee does not find them unnerving or downright intimidating. These questions, too, need to be phrased so that they do not limit the interviewee's response repertoire. You do not want interviewees, in other words (by the nature of your series of questions) feeling compelled to distort their responses for the sake of your research method.

Knowing the material I wanted my interviews to cover, I began my interview guide or my structured interview schedule with the relatively straight-forward questions appearing in

Appendix C.

With the aid of these questions, I was able to focus my structured interviews. As a result, I gathered descriptive, operational data about the six obstacles I had already uncovered. It is interesting to note at this time that very few men (only six) responded at length to my last question ("Are there any additional obstacles or problems you experience in your closest relationships with women, issues we have not discussed?"). With only a few precautionary warnings, that can be taken as a sign that my schemata (the six obstacles) amply covered the terrain.

Four of these six men felt that the issue of "power" in a relationship was a major obstacle for them in forming intimate relationships with women, i.e., the entire issue of who controls the relationship, whose choices and desires get enacted and whose go unheeded. It became clear in the course of my interviews with these and other men, however, that this issue of "power" more than adequately could be subsumed under the much broader heading, "anger." When men spoke about their anger towards women, the interviews very often addressed these power struggles in romantic relationships. The inevitable power struggles, too, that often plague a romantic relationship were mentioned by many men in their discussions of the "fear of dependency" obstacle.

Part II: Structured Interviews

These two hundred and thirty interviews, like the initial seventy, were all face-to-face interactions. And like the first series of interviews, they were also all sampled in a "snow ball fashion," tape-recorded and eventually transcribed.

Subjects. As with my first round of seventy interviews, I had only two strictures on who I interviewed in my second round of two hundred and thirty interviews: that they be heterosexual and currently or recently involved in an intimate/love relationship with a woman. As a result, I interviewed men of all ages (ranging from fifteen to eighty-six); of all socioeconomic levels (some with no incomes, others with six-digit annual net incomes; see Appendix A); and a wide cross-section of religious and ethnic affiliations.

My subjects were again assured confidentiality by a written consent form (see Appendix B).

Participants were all contacted by telephone at least one week prior to the interview. My pool of subjects (as with the first round of interviews) was supplied by asking interviewees if they could kindly recommend other men who might be interested in such an interview. In this fashion, one interviewee, say, might recommend my calling his brothers/sons/co-workers/friends. I conducted interviews in New York City, Northampton and Amherst, Massachusetts, San

Francisco, Los Angeles, Monte Rio, California and Chicago, Illinois. Without exception, all these interviews took place either in the homes or work places of my participants, or on some neutral ground--a restaurant, bar, park bench.

Procedure and instrumentation. I told each man on the telephone (prior to the interview) that I would simply be asking him six questions, all of them regarding his intimate relationships with women. I did not tell my interviewees the specific questions, however, until the actual interview. At the interview, I asked the questions (see Appendix C), then allowed my interviewees to respond.

Because I was employing a structured interview format, I would only occasionally coax my interviewees to elaborate about a response. I tried to simply ask the question, encourage my interviewee to be thorough, and then move on to the next questions. As with my first round of interviews, these interviews were also tape-recorded. No interview exceeded three hours and most were over within ninety minutes.

Analysis. I was now ready to re-listen to each interview. Essentially, I was winnowing through these interviews, seeking out the underlying themes that repeated themselves. Specifically, I was trying to better understand via these tape-recorded interviews how these six emotional obstacles operated in men's lives. And what, if anything, men could do to better deal with them. As with all

qualitative research, this involved a certain speculative process. Theory and hypotheses building regarding the dynamics of these various obstacles needed to be built from both empirical observation and intuitive thinking.

I listened carefully to each interview, taking notes, uncovering recurring themes. In a sense, this second series of interviews helped me "atomize" the various emotional obstacles. Listening to hundreds of men discussing these same six emotional issues, I could progressively refine my understanding of these often troublesome issues.

Brief Summary of Method

The data collecting phase of my project was over; three hundred interviews had been collected and collated. Seventy unstructured interviews had yielded six recurring psychological obstacles. Two hundred and thirty structured interviews had given me additional data, data that would be helping me to determine just how these obstacles operated for men in their intimate relationships with women. It remained for me to now synthesize all these data into a lengthy, clearly written research study.

Fleshing Out the Six Obstacles

The subject/problem this dissertation explores was: men and intimate relationships with women. My "method of attack"

was to write clearly and relatively simply about six of the more common psychological obstacles that I abstracted from interviews in a sample of men. The selection of these obstacles, as well as what I wrote about each of them, was determined by my research which consisted of: extensive interviewing with men of varied socioeconomic backgrounds (as has been detailed), the literature (primarily the psychoanalytic and family systems literature) introduced in the review of literature section, and my own self-observations.

This last research component--my self-observation--needs to be very briefly explained. Many scientists (from the natural and social sciences) do not study themselves directly. "Facts," they feel, must be external to the individual. But other scientists, especially those with a phenomenological and/or a psychoanalytic orientation (e.g., Freud, James, Rogers) do consider themselves as prime sources of data. I align myself with this latter group--with those who see genuine and productive legitimacy in using themselves as a field for data collection. Though the vast majority of my findings about men and romantic relationships have been derived from my extensive interviewing of others, some were partially derived from self-observation.

Over an eight-year period, I closely observed myself vis-a-vis romantic relationships. These observations were then recorded in seven composition notebooks. I occasionally draw

upon some of these journal inclusions in the course of this dissertation.

In addition, I conducted thirty two-hour interviews with women. These were face-to-face unstructured interviews. These interviews, though not part of the research design for this dissertation, nevertheless yielded corroborative material for the study. In certain sections of the dissertation, I have included portions from these interviews.

Summary

The usefulness of this qualitative research study lies in two primary areas: as a tool for deriving empirical hypotheses about men and romantic relationships and as a forum for presenting a set of ideas that may help future researchers and the lay public in thinking about these often confounding issues. Ultimately, my dissertation is an exploration of what I have come to see as six of the most common obstacles men experience in forming and sustaining truly intimate romantic relationships. My research has convinced me that every man and every couple, to varying degrees of intensity and to varying degrees of awareness, necessarily traverses the six terrains I have outlined. Every man and every couple, in other words, at some point in their lives, I believe, must grapple with these issues of dependency, autonomy, anger, jealousy, infidelity, and the

complex logistics of finding time to be together.

Finding and identifying patterns from a broad data pool, along with the search for accurate descriptive definitions has been the aim of this qualitative research study. In summarizing heterogeneous facts and findings into general statements, my study will hopefully be making, as the Graduate School Bulletin makes clear in regards to dissertations, "a contribution to knowledge."

NOTES

¹This work by Schwartz and Jacobs has influenced much of my thinking about qualitative research. Needless to say, I am indebted to them for their lucid, well-reasoned book.

CHAPTER III

THE EXTINCTION OBSTACLE

Definition

When two people meet and begin to form a trusting and intimate relationship, feelings of extreme well-being can result. As the French novelist, Marcel Proust (1928), wrote in Swann's Way:

Ah, in those earliest days of love, how naturally the kisses spring into life. How closely, in their abundance, are they pressed one against another; until lovers would find it as hard to count the kisses exchanged in a hour, as to count the flowers in a meadow in May. (p. 182)

Again, a man meets a woman. They dine together. After an especially good dinner and an especially intense talk, they walk out into the street and anything--the color of someone's scarf, the chrome on a car, a bus pulling away from a curb--takes on a new clarity for them, a suprarealness. Love, as songwriters and poets have long known, can literally be an altered state in its earliest stages.

Love's "magic"--its energizing sweetness, its sublime ecstasy--is very real for all who have known it.

One man I interviewed shared with me the "magic" he felt upon meeting a "special" woman:

I arrived in Paris on a Friday afternoon. I was staying at a hotel right on the Champs-Elysees. I unpacked my baggage, went downstairs, and in front of my hotel there was a sidewalk cafe, so I sat down. I was waiting for a friend who said he'd pick

me up at seven o'clock for dinner. So I'm sitting, it's five, five-thirty in Paris, and a woman walks by. I had never picked up a girl on the street. All of the women I met, I'd met socially, through friends. I had never in my life picked a girl up. But this girl walks by, and for the first time in my life I want to talk to her. I want to stop her and talk to her. I can't explain it to you. I'd just arrived in Paris and there she was--walking in a big rush-hour crowd. Then she passed my table and was gone. I sat down and tried to forget about it.

Later, my friend came and we had dinner together and then went to a very good musical. We got out of the show at about eleven, and we'd planned on meeting some of his friends at a bar afterward. We walked to the bar. It was a beautiful night, a warm night, and all of a sudden, I don't know what it was, I said to my friend, "Listen, I don't feel well. Do me a favor. You know these people. Go there without me. I'm going home." This was about eleven, eleven-fifteen. So I took a cab. I don't really know why I left. Then I got out of the cab, paid the driver, and I turned around and there she was.

We started talking. She told me her name, a beautiful French name, and she was lovely. I told her about what had happened to me and she said she believed in things like that. It was so fabulous. I could have gone with my friend and never have seen her again. It was too much of a coincidence. She came back to my hotel that night without any ado, without talking about it, and she didn't leave.

Another man, in his eighties when I interviewed him, described his "magical" meeting with a woman. After forty-seven years of marriage, his memories of that first meeting were still vivid:

I was playing my violin at the Roxy on Fifty-third and Broadway in 1927. It was a magnificent music hall. All the big theaters in those days--the Strand, the Rivoli, the Capitol, the Colony, and the Roxy--had a ballet company and an orchestra, a big orchestra that played for the movies because there were no talkies yet As I was playing my violin--and after playing the same slow show over and over I could play it from memory--I began to

look around a little. But from the orchestra pit, I could only see legs, forty dancing legs on the stage. I couldn't see any of the faces of the ballet dancers. These ballet dancers opened the show. Now women won't like this, but I'm what's known as a leg man. So I'd count all the dancers' legs and I'd look at all of them. But my eyes would always stop when I got to this one particular pair of legs. I kept doing this, looking at all the legs--and they were all very beautiful--but somehow I always ended up stopping at this one pair. So one day, very quietly, I raised myself from my seat so I could see from the pit who this girl was. And there was Becky, this youngster, so young. And, you know, it just kind of touched me. She was completely innocent. She was so beautiful to look at. Truthfully, I knew that day that I wanted to marry her I'll tell you, and this is true, that over the years, and it's been over forty-five years and that's a very long time . . . well, I won't tell you that I love her more today than when I first met her, but I will tell you that I love her as much now as when I first saw her--legs first, then her face--that day at the Roxy.

And one man, less prone to a "romantic" view of the world, stated: "I don't believe in the lightning-bolt love affair but somehow we just hit it off in a really big way--so I guess it was a lightning bolt."

Love is a violinist eyeing his beloved ballerina for the first time. Love is a fortuitous meeting on a spring night in Paris. Love is Bogey and Bacall in To Have and Have Not. What we are too often never told, though, is that love is not always magical. And especially in the beginning it can be altogether maddening.

Men, in particular, have a difficult time with love during the early phases of a new relationship (Castillejo, 1973, p. 14). This is because love's more expanded states of being are accompanied for them by a terrible though usually

unconscious fear.

This is a fear men have of losing their independence in a close relationships. It is the fear, Dr. Rollo May (1975) states, "of being totally absorbed by the other, the fear of losing one's self and one's autonomy," (p. 79). I call this fear the Extinction Obstacle.

One of the early psychoanalysts, Otto Rank, described this fear, this initial obstacle all men encounter on their different roads to love. He chose to call it the "death fear." It is, for Rank, viewed as a fear of being narcissistically wounded; our imposing egoism thwarted (Rank, 1971, pp. 14-15). Whatever its name, it refers to the fear men have of losing their autonomy in an intimate relationship.

It is this fear that is behind Theodore Reik's (1944) statement that very often

the person whom love approaches does not welcome it as a gift, but tries to chase it away as an intruder. Love appears first as an emotion which the person is afraid of, however desirable it may appear to the conscious mind It is as if the ego were afraid of a danger, of a threatening loss. (p. 43)

How the Obstacle Operates in Romantic Relationships

I received a phone call one Saturday night from a friend of a friend. This man, a well-to-do real estate broker in his mid-thirties, knew I was conducting a research project

about "men and love." He apologized for calling me on a weekend, but then said it was urgent; he needed to talk to someone.

He began to tell me how he had just met a woman and he was sure she was the "one." He had never been more attracted to anyone in his life. He said:

She has everything. Looks, poise, sensitivity, empathy, ambition. But you know, I'm scared to death. I swear, I don't even know who I am anymore. My business--it's the last thing I think about. The relationship's just pulling me all over the place.

He was sharing with me, in the typically inarticulate way these feelings often get expressed, his deepest fears about falling in love. He was telling me that love, at these very early stages, was thrilling. But somehow it was also strangely and uncomfortably unhinging: It was making him feel higher than he had ever felt but also more disoriented than he generally liked to feel. "I'm losing control" was an expression he used a lot.

If he had had the words available to him, he would have said, "I'm battling the Extinction Obstacle."

I interviewed this man after our telephone conversation. And clearly, he had fallen in love (or at least into a very deep infatuation). When we talked, he told me about all the lofty moments he was having with this woman: How they talked for hours, sharing their dreams for the future life together, how they had told one another they had never felt more comfortable with anyone else in their lives. But after

telling me about all these connected and rapturous moments, he would invariably start telling me how scared it was all making him.

Prior to meeting her, this man sensed his life needed a change. He was making a lot of money but he still felt unfulfilled. So he had left his family's business, and with no real plans in mind, he had traveled around the country, finally settling in a small college town in Southern California. He had friends there; plus, he was thinking of returning to school to study architecture, a longtime passion.

After only two weeks in this idyllic college town, he and Janice had met. And for a while, their relationship felt ecstatic. They spent practically every moment together--making love and talking. It was, Paul later confided, "other-worldly."

There were, of course, little things that bothered them about each other. Janice felt, for instance, that Paul could be a little too rigid--that if he wanted something, he could be inflexible. And there were even times when she felt he could be arrogant. Paul, in turn, felt Janice was sometimes overly critical. But these were small complaints really; nothing their intense love could not handle.

Their relationship went along fairly smoothly. But then, Janice began asking Paul about these mildly irksome traits. She just wanted to talk about them with him. At that point,

Paul very quickly made it clear he wanted no part in her "cross-examinations." His tender feelings immediately vanished the moment she broached either his stubbornness or his condescension. As Paul later said: "I just couldn't handle her prying into my interior life. I knew there was something sincere about what she was doing. But there was also something very critical."

Janice had touched Paul's deepest emotional difficulties and these were issues Paul was not ready to explore. He just was not ready to be vulnerable with either himself or a woman.

Paul very quickly put up a rigid wall around himself. He became withdrawn--practically inaccessible to Janice. His once overflowing emotions were now coolly reserved. As a result, three months after it had begun, their relationship was over.

These rigid walls, these defenses that Paul (and many other men in similar situations) mobilized are shields from intimacy. They are a man's protection from becoming too close, too self-revealing to a woman. Ultimately, they are what keeps at bay this Extinction Obstacle. If a man can coolly retreat into his protective shell, the threat of vulnerability, of losing himself in a woman, can be quashed.

Further Operational Definitions

In the very beginning of a love relationship, when a man is in the company of a new woman he cares about, he will often try to firm up his sense of himself. He will do this to allay his unconscious fears of engulfment. He will subtly (or not so subtly) let the woman know, for example, just how successful he is, or how he wants only a mature and independent relationship from now on in; or, even more classic, he will offhandedly tell her about all the other women who are anxiously waiting in the wings. One man I interviewed put it this way:

I never went out with just one woman. I always went out with two or three women at the same time so that anytime I started feeling too much for one of them, the next day I'd be sure to be with someone else.

Again, men will do this, this re-cementing of their inner defensive walls, because they are simultaneously fearing that this new woman may soon be "too close for comfort."

If these gentler stratagems all fail--and as a relationship intensifies they generally do--men, I have observed, will then resort to more elaborate and often much more cruel defenses. Some men will abruptly pull back their warmth, their previous effusive emotions becoming hardened; or some men will just suddenly start launching into cruel harangues about what they most despise in their new lovers. And some men will simply choose trivial annoyances to prey upon. One man I interviewed told me how he kept complaining

to his girlfriend about her klutziness around tools. Another man confided how all of a sudden he just could not cope with his girlfriend's slightly pointed and asymmetrical chin. And both these men, in vacillating moments of earnestness and confusion, told me these were valid reasons to withdraw their love from these once "special" women.

What was happening to both of these men was that as they were intensifying their emotional involvements with these women, neither one was quite ready for the experience. They were experiencing love's earliest advances not as some divine grace, but rather--and this is the Extinction Obstacle at work--as an ever-encroaching threat to their inner equilibrium.

Another man, recently divorced but legally separated for many years, was living with a new woman when I interviewed him. He cared for her, but there was no way, he told me, he would ever marry her. "I'll only marry a woman if she's into a career, if her head's together, and if she isn't going to be bugging me about anything." His list of prerequisites went on to include beauty, wealth, and no commitment to monogamy. It was clear he was emotionally distancing himself from the woman he was living with by setting such standards for a future spouse.

This very common male distancing stratagem I call the "Bionic Woman Syndrome." By creating an idealized perfect specimen--one that exists only in his imagination--a man can

put off, just a little longer, the joys and pains of being vulnerable to the flesh-and-blood women he is either living with or dating. This Bionic Woman Syndrome is, simply, another of the walls men put up to keep women out.

One man, struggling to make a commitment to a woman he was dating, admitted experiencing this Bionic Woman Syndrome. "It's like I'm looking for a perfect fit in an off-the-rack world," he stated. "And I know I'm doing it just so I can stall a little longer."

There are two other classic defenses men employ to keep love at arm's length. Frequently, a man will complain to a woman during the early phases of a relationship that he cannot be monogamous. It feels, he says, too constricting for him. In some cases, this is a very real and tormenting struggle. But in many cases, it is just another way for a man to keep the Extinction Obstacle at bay--a way for a man to further resist a woman's love. (This defense will be explored in greater depth in Chapter VIII.)

The other very common defense is something I call the "Loss of Love Excuse." A lot of men, especially at the beginning of a relationship are genuinely perplexed when they feel themselves losing love for a woman. They wake up one morning, and for a variety of reasons (often having nothing to do with the specific woman they are with) they just do not feel the same magic anymore. Many men then take this temporary loss of love to be a sign--a sign that it is time

I'd get into these really wavering kinds of thoughts. And I guess I felt that if I loved Joanne, really loved her, then I wouldn't be feeling all these swings. You know, I'd just love her and that would be that.

I finally talked to her about it. It was haunting me. You know, I'd find myself loving our coziness--watching old movies, making breakfast. But then, there'd be these thoughts; that we weren't right for each other; I didn't really love her; she was too straight for me. I even felt I should leave her because I'd just end up hurting her anyway.

Well, these were like little dark pockets in my head. When I finally told her about them, and it took me a few months, it felt like a heavy weight was coming off my head. By her reaction, I could tell she didn't feel they were much to worry about, just part of the ups and downs of any relationship. She went through something like it, she said; just not as intense.

It's not like these thoughts are now gone forever. They just don't feel so threatening. I don't have to act on them.

It is always hard, of course, especially at the very beginning of a new relationship, to know if the doubts and reservations you are feeling about someone are genuine or not. Are they real or are they just the Extinction Obstacle at work? Are they things you will genuinely have a hard time with later on or are they just superficial obstacles you are putting in love's way, the result of being afraid of getting too close to someone?

All you can really do at this point in a relationship is to patiently sift through these doubts; and then, as honestly as possible, decide which are the twenty-four carat doubts and which are the fool's gold. But by knowing some of the more common forms of fool's gold--some of the more common

to end their relationship.

But the Extinction Obstacle's convenient and skewed logic is prompting this faulty conclusion. What these men do not know (and what the Extinction Obstacle does not want them to know) is that this sort of vicissitudes, these risings and fallings in the amount of love a man feels for his partner, is a normal part of any romantic relationship. In the course of a long-term romantic relationship, a man (or a woman) can fall in and out of love with their mate many, many times. But again, afraid of becoming too dependent on a woman, many men end their relationships at the very first signs that love is on the wane.

The following interview with a thirty-year-old man--a social worker from Boston--graphically illustrates this often subtle dynamic:

I met Joanne about seven months ago. She's a high-powered lawyer. A mutual friend introduced us.

Joanne wasn't the type of woman I'm usually attracted to. She's more normal, if you know what I mean. My past has been filled with some fairly strange ladies, really needy types who didn't have it together in the world. I would play, you know, "big daddy" to them. But then I met Joanne, who's really successful and independent.

I got into this thing with Joanne. We'd spend most of our weekends together. We'd stay at one of our apartments. And, I swear, it would get weird. I'd look at Joanne and I'd really love her; I'd feel really great. But then, in just a little while, I'd look at her again and I'd, well, I'd lose the good feelings. I'd just be looking at her and thinking to myself that she wasn't really right for me; that she wasn't hip enough or mysterious enough. It felt schitzy.

defenses the Extinction Obstacle mobilizes--it will at least be easier to discern between deeper-level doubts and the more superficial ones.

Psychological Profile of Extinction Obstacle

This Extinction Obstacle, the fear of losing autonomy in a love relationship, is experienced differently by every man. For some, it is experienced as if the glue that has previously held them together was beginning to lose hold a bit. They feel a little more vaporous, less solid somehow. For others, it can be an even more threatening feeling, as if they are drowning--the feeling that they are too quickly being swept away from the shores of themselves.

Just how threateningly a man experiences this obstacle depends on many factors. But how comfortable (or how uncomfortable) he is with intimacy is clearly pivotal.

Fundamentally, the Extinction Obstacle is a primal fear of intimacy. It is the fear that if a man is too intimate, then he will somehow end up losing himself (and his control) in a romantic relationship. So if a man has never known real intimacy--the spontaneous sharing of his deeper self--say with his mother or his father, or later with a brother or a sister, or even later with a friend, then he will invariably have a wretched time battling this obstacle. Never having experienced intimacy as a nonthreatening and salutary

experience in any of his earlier relationships, it will be painful for him to experience it later on with a woman.

Dr. Otto Kernberg (1967), a well-known psychiatrist, along with a number of other researchers, has carefully observed how this ability to experience intimacy in our adult relationships is complicated by our earliest familial interactions. According to these theorists, just as, say, the developing body of a fetus or an infant needs to be fed regularly and nutritiously by its mother, the nascent self and personality of an infant also needs to be appropriately cared for: Our selves--our senses of who we are--need a stable diet of protective and engaging parental attention in order to develop into healthy adults; i.e., adults capable of experiencing intimate relationships. And, conversely, if this self--this at first chaotic and undifferentiated brawl of emotions, ideas, and passions--is ignored or given only superficial or sporadic parental attention, then it will grow strangely or stuntedly, or sometimes even not at all; its ability to create meaningful adult relationships is thereby severely impaired.

Dr. Kernberg has gone so far as to posit a sort of mental health continuum based on this premise. Schizophrenics, he states, who probably received very little healthy parental attention, often have a total incapacity to create genital and tender relations with other human beings. And at the extreme other end of the spectrum are people who were given

reliable and sensitive parental attention. These are people, according to Dr. Kernberg, who can integrate sexuality and tenderness into a stable adult relationship.

Somewhere between these two extremes, of course, lie all the rest of us.

So it is especially our parents, by either engaging and respecting or else by ignoring and punishing our deeper selves, who ultimately prepare us (or who fail to prepare us) for our adult romantic relationships. They are the ones who offer us our earliest training--by the way they relate to us and by the way they relate to each other--in how to be emotionally engaged (or disengaged), in how to be honest (or dishonest), and in how to be affectionate (or cold) in a love relationship. Because of our parents, we bring to our adult romantic relationships basically sound or basically faulty selves. And because of them, our wrestlings with the Extinction Obstacle are either tolerable or excruciating.

Cultural prejudices, too--prejudices that often are transmitted to us via our parents and the media--can also activate the Extinction Obstacle. One man I interviewed, a thirty-six-year-old man, shared with me some of his culturally-conditioned fears of engulfment.

Suddenly, I felt like this whole relationship with Susan was wrong because she wasn't supposed to earn more money than I was. It was a put-down. I was earning \$15,000 and she was earning \$25,000. And there was no way I knew of at that time where I could possibly catch up. And I knew that I wasn't into earning a lot of money because I was enjoying what I was doing. The sense of gratification I got

from my work was worth it. Intellectually, I could say like, "Hey, it doesn't really make any difference." And it was even flattering because it meant the woman I was with was worth a lot, that she was very bright and intelligent. But that was on the intellectual side. On the emotional side, it was very threatening. I really went through a whole emotional trauma. But finally I said, "Hey, this is all bullshit. What's the difference if she makes more money than I do? I oughta be glad." And once that settled in, then of course the intellectual side won out and I thought it was terrific. And I also saw that Susan wasn't rejecting me for not earning more, that she wasn't even thinking about it, and that she was saying, "Hey, what's the difference? Who the hell cares who earns more money? I'm interested in you." I realized that she could have reversed that whole situation on me and then I'd really be in trouble because then I'd really go through a trip of how I'd been rejected because I wasn't earning enough money. So finally I realized how really fine it was that I was with such a bright lady who really cared about me.

The Extinction Obstacle: Additional Reflections

After a man meets a woman, he will inevitably be in for a battle with this Extinction Obstacle. And his early battles are often the fiercest. But these first bouts usually subside as he gets used to surrendering some of his autonomy for the greater pay-offs of a relationship. This Extinction Obstacle relaxes its tentacles, in other words, as Nena O'Neill (1977), co-author of Open Marriage, states,

when a man learns that his freedom to grow does not come from refusing to enter into committed relationships but instead in the capacity to become himself within the relationship. (p. 11)

This Extinction Obstacle starts spewing fire again, however, immediately after the question of marriage arises.

It is a simply formula: As a man's fears of being engulfed in a long-term marriage are activated, his resistances to that relationship increase.

One man I interviewed told me how he periodically announced his marriage plans, only to call his friends two weeks later to postpone them. He just did not feel emotionally ready for a long-term relationship. This sort of seesawing is very common for men on the verge of marriage. They are enacting what I call the Extinction Obstacle Spasms--three steps forward in the direction of marriage, followed by two steps backward.

Other men--men who have been living with the same woman for many years but who do not like to even mention the idea of getting married--are caught in still another of the Extinction Obstacle's dances. These men often love the women they are with. But their love still is not strong enough, or maybe they feel their partner's love isn't trustworthy enough, for them to give up more of their independence.

These men, incidentally, will sometimes defend the fact that they are "still living with" and "not yet married to" these women by pointing out the meaninglessness of a marriage certificate: Who needs a piece of paper to corroborate love? Their argument is sound. But what is often behind their argument is their inability to make that deeper plunge into a more committed relationship. The step from "living together" to "getting married," simply, is a larger step than the

Extinction Obstacle is allowing them to make.

CHAPTER IV

THE FUSION OBSTACLE

Definition

Psychologists and poets have long known that there exists in men an almost primitive urge to be merged with their lovers, some strong and usually unconscious desire to lose themselves in their mates. At some very deep level, men sense in themselves, as the psychologist Dorothy Dinnerstein (1977) explains, "A temptation to give way to a ferocious and voracious dependence on women" (p. 78). This sometimes overpowering male urge I call the Fusion Obstacle. (This word, fusion, is currently used in physics. It describes any process whereby diverse elements are merged. It is a term, too, that family therapists have recently adopted.)

Many men, at a relationship's outset, vehemently resist love. But then, at some point, when they finally stop resisting, they end up falling desperately in love: Once a woman gets through a man's defensive walls, men are likely to fall hopelessly in love.

Operational and Psychological Definitions

This tendency, this strong tendency in men to become increasingly dependent on their women, is usually masked at

first. Men will try to deny their dependency needs at the beginning of a relationship, and they will do this by treating their wives or girlfriends as if they were the excessively fragile and dependent ones. But as much as a man tries to play the part of the strong lover, at some deeper place he is often feeling very vulnerable and very dependent.

Now a certain amount--indeed, a large amount--of mutual dependency is necessary for creating intimacy in love relationships. We need to be able to express our neediness to each other, our primal dependency on each other, and not be condemned or banished for doing so. Indeed, most romantic love theorists (Casler, 1969; Rubin 1970) see dependency as a prerequisite for the growth of a romantic relationship.

But the question is: How not to be too dependent but dependent enough? And, unfortunately, too many men err in the direction of becoming overly dependent.

What is this Fusion Obstacle, this overdependence about? Why are men so drawn to being fused with their spouses? "The force behind fusion," Dr. Thomas F. Fogarty (1979), a family therapist, explains, "is the desperate hope of filling one's emptiness by uniting with or taking something from another person." It is a sense of inner emptiness, therefore, a feeling that the pylons supporting their ego are either insubstantial or else totally nonexistent, that propels many men into becoming overly dependent on women.

One man I interviewed, a thirty-four-year-old Los Angeles

lawyer, spoke to me about these hollow, inner feelings:

On the weekends, I'm often the last person to leave the beach. That's when I feel it. I'm walking back to my car and I feel--well, I feel like I don't exist. I dunno, like I'm some sort of Martian who doesn't know what the hell he's doing down here I can usually make the feelings go away by getting in my car and throwing on a tape. But I know it's there . . . I just try not to feel it.

A couple of years ago, when those feelings hit, I'd go out and pick up a woman. I got into, you know, a sex binge; a different woman every other night. No way was I going to stay alone in my apartment.

This man sensed his inner emptiness. He knew, deep down, things just were not right.

This sense of inner emptiness, these feelings that blindly propel many men into either superficial sexual binges or else into overly dependent relationships, have, unfortunately, become more and more widespread in our culture. As Christopher Lasch (1979), the author of The Culture of Narcissism, states, "The sense of inner emptiness combined with a dependence on the vicarious warmth provided by others, along with a fear of that dependence, is common" (p. 74). It is the psychological baggage too many of us today--men and women alike--are carrying.

Making matters worse is the fact that most men are barely aware of these feelings in themselves. Their lives, in fact, are often spent frantically avoiding them.

One woman, a twenty-two-year-old college senior, told me about her involvement with a man who had succumbed to the

Fusion Obstacle:

We started dating and for a while it really clicked. I respected Peter. He was a warm guy, really honest, not like a lot of the guys you meet. But what happened was he started falling in love faster than me.

A few months into the relationship, I started getting sort of scared. I'd just never seen anything like it. This guy who I really thought had it together, all of a sudden was acting like a baby. He wanted me to marry him. But when I said "no," he wouldn't stop crying. So I held him. You know, and for a few days this went on. But then, it all started switching to anger and then he just started going nuts on me, slamming doors, cursing, throwing things.

He'd flip and then he'd just come back into my room and tell me he had to sleep next to me, that he couldn't be alone: He'd be this puppy dog one minute, this helpless, vulnerable thing, but then he'd just become an angry monster.

This sort of wild mood vacillations--anger at your mate one moment, followed by unmanageable vulnerability--often means a man is in the jaws of the Fusion Obstacle.

This Fusion Obstacle--the psychological hunger that makes a man start wanting love too much--is an obstacle that subverts a balanced, human love because anything you become addicted to, you end up not just loving. After a while you begin to hate whatever it is you need so much.

Once a man has established his primary relationship with a woman, he will often start to abandon all his other relationships. This further exacerbates male dependency on women. In this process, a man often ends up becoming a social isolate, his wife his only life connection.

Countless men I spoke with told me how they had only superficial relationships with everyone except their wives. Wives, on the other hand, usually had close friends, other women they could confide in.

One irate wife complained to me about her excessively dependent husband:

He's such a needy person, so dependent. He just depends on me for every goddamned thing. It drives me up the wall, absolutely drives me up the wall. He doesn't have any interests of his own, any friendships of his own. He sits and sleeps in that chair or in that TV room whenever we don't have a plan for a particular night. He's always asking me what do I have planned, what are we doing tonight You know, I do the social planning but it would be nice if he took an interest sometimes. I just can't hack being sucked at all the time.

This exclusive dependency that many men develop for their wives is, again, what can become dangerous in a marriage. It is what causes a man's love to become clutchier and more possessive. Ultimately, it is what ruins many marriages. This sort of clutchiness, as the novelist May Sarton (1977) says, in a personal memoir, "is the surest way to murder love" (p. 201).

Antidotes for the Fusion Obstacle

It is rough going for a man when he is in the throes of this obstacle. Again, the mood swings he is experiencing--anger one moment, unmanageable vulnerability the next--can be tormenting. To free himself from these potent claws of the

Fusion Obstacle he has to first come to terms with his own expanses of inner emptiness; those hollow feelings his desperate and clinging love wants to cover up. He needs to take, in other words, a long and serious look at himself, at his inner depths. But this sort of process of self-examination (which I will be exploring in Chapter IX of this dissertation) is no easy task for men. It involves grappling with occasionally uncomfortable emotions; vulnerability, fears of rejection, overdependence, jealousy, even potentially unhinging waves of tenderness. And, traditionally, men have been vexed and fearful of the realm of the emotions.

One man I interviewed who was completing a master's degree in sculpture told me about his inability to talk with his girlfriend about his emotions. Unfortunately, the inability led to the break-up of his relationship.

Betty always complained about our relationship. Essentially what she always said to me was the same thing. "You don't talk to me enough, you don't respond to what I'm thinking and feeling, and you don't tell me what you're thinking and feeling." And I never knew what to do about it. What she really wanted to know was what was I feeling, what were all the different ways I was feeling, what made me feel one way then another. She wanted to know just what was happening with me. But I didn't know what was happening. I just went through my days so unconnected from my feelings. I was obsessed with what I was doing; just that I was so focused on all the things I had to do during the day. So my pattern was really to suppress what I was feeling, to not examine myself that closely. And those were the things--my feelings--that Betty wanted to hear from me. So she kept saying "Talk to me," and I couldn't. I just couldn't talk to her about the things she wanted me to talk about. And the whole

situation was always complicated by the pressure I always felt, the pressure that was always there for me to respond.

I never really understood how serious it was. Other than talking, our relationship functioned smoothly. The details of the day-to-day stuff were fine. We had no conflicts with cooking, shopping, cleaning, and our schedules didn't really conflict with each other. And we both relied heavily on the physical presence of one another. Just having someone to love and to hold and to be with and to wake up to. And both of us were very much into the idea of a home.

I don't know how I might have responded to Betty if I'd known how seriously she thought I wasn't giving her what she wanted. I don't know if I could have given her what she wanted even if I understood how badly she wanted it. There were changes I had to go through before I could begin to see what she meant by "really talking to one another." I think it took this whole business of her leaving me to open me up to my feelings and perceptions.

I always accepted that what Betty wanted of me was right, that it was something I should give her. And I always felt inadequate that I couldn't talk to her the way she wanted me to talk to her. I accepted that it was fair for her to be asking for it but I just didn't know how to give her what she wanted.

Why are men so afraid of their emotions? The answer, on one level, is simple. Conditioning. In childhood, parents, especially fathers, feel pressured to reject their sons' feelings of dependence and tenderness. They habitually dismiss them as "sissy." So most men, brought up to believe that expressing their feelings is a sign of weakness, feel they have to repress their vulnerable, softer selves.

What then happens in romantic relationships is that men punish women for experiencing and verbalizing these softer

emotions. Angry because they have been denied access to these deeper areas of feeling, men, unfortunately, too often end up projecting their self-rage and frustration onto women.

How to stay balanced in a romantic relationship? How not to be too dependent but dependent enough? These are questions we continually need to ask ourselves. But clearly, love is possible only when we have created a strong inner core; when we have more or less started to integrate our strengths and our weaknesses, our doubts and ambivalences. Once that is accomplished, we can then have some healthy degree of inner detachment, some center of ourselves that is inviolate. And this will be the part of ourselves that can stand on its own, that does not need to be fused with others.

If we have that sort of firm inner anchor--a more or less secure sense of who we are--then we can allow others to have it, too. And that anchor (or, as psychoanalytic thinkers would say, that "differentiated sense of identity") is what allows us to not hate or simply tolerate, but to accept and even value all that is different from ourselves in others. It is what allows us to experience our fellow human beings as enjoyable and stimulating, and not just as foreign and threatening.

That anchor is what really allows us to battle the "Fusion Obstacle." It is what allows our relationships to go beyond the simple gratification of the often compulsive needs of our faulty selves.

In the end, that inner anchor is our chance for reciprocal and mutually benefiting romantic relationships.

The ideal state of marriage, says Ronald Fairbairn (1954), a leading British psychoanalyst,

is a relationship involving evenly matched giving and taking between two differentiated individuals who are mutually dependent, and between whom there is no disparity of dependence. (p. 147)

So an independent, differentiated and relatively autonomous self relating to another independent, differentiated, and autonomous self is the goal. Clearly it is a difficult goal to attain. But it is in our attempts to obtain it, that we become stronger and more compassionate human beings.

Summary: The Extinction and the Fusion Obstacles

Men, then, are constantly battling two very conflictual feelings all along love's journey: the need and desire to be deeply connected to one woman (the "Fusion Obstacle") versus the desire to keep their "freedom" and to not be tied down (the "Extinction Obstacle").

These fears are major psychological themes for any man; and they are fears that are not only present at the beginning of a love relationship either. They exist, unfortunately, all throughout a romantic relationship; making their most painful appearances at certain nodal points: When it is time to decide whether or not to get married . . . when it is time

to decide whether or not to have a child . . . when it is time to decide whether or not to have an affair.

In a deeper sense, men never really finish their battles with the "Extinction Obstacle" or the "Fusion Obstacle." The fear of entrapment and the pull towards dependency accompany them throughout their lives. But, over the years, as a man surrenders more and more to the love he feels for his spouse, and as he slowly acquires more and more self-knowledge, the intensity of his battles will die down.

We all walk a tightrope in love. The Extinction Obstacle is pushing us one way, far away from love, while the Fusion Obstacle is pushing us the other way, toward too much dependency. And the questions always is: How to stay balanced, how to stay on the wire?

Clearly, we can accomplish this balancing act only by knowing who we are: And to do that, we first have to locate what is genuinely ours, and then we have to differentiate what is ours from our spouse's. It is a very delicate process: If you differentiate yourself too much from your spouse, you lose your relationship. But if you do not differentiate yourself enough, you lose yourself.

C H A P T E R V
THE ANGER OBSTACLE

Definition

What follows are excerpts from an interview with a forty-five-year-old theatrical agent from Los Angeles. It serves as a vivid introduction to the Anger Obstacle:

Right now both my wife and I have reached a sort of plateau and we've seen that we've established patterns. You know, at some time in your life everything is in flux and all your dreams are in the future. But at a certain age you begin to realize that patterns are being formed and that where I'm at now is roughly where I'm going to be in say fifteen years. And at that point people begin pouting. That's where my wife and I are now. So there are great tensions in our marriage now because we're both reexamining what we want. You start asking yourselves how far is all this from where your fantasies were when it first started.

From my point of view, our life isn't too far from where I wanted it to be. But for Barbara it's very far.

Barbara's a very successful TV writer in Los Angeles, an Emmy winner, so she has a very good income. But, you know, we have two kids in private school and all the accouterments that go along with that. Plus, we spend an enormous amount of money on household help. So right there--the kid's school bill comes to \$8,000 a year and the help is like \$7,000 a year--is \$15,000 from our net which eats up over twenty grand of our gross. So essentially, Barbara wants me to earn more money. That's really the crux of most of our disputes.

Now by my standards, I think I'm a great success--but that's cutting the cloth to fit the body. I enjoy my work. I really enjoy the independence I have. I could certainly make more money from my business but that would make me responsible to too many people which would ruin my

independence. God knows, I'd love to be a millionaire. I have nothing at all against money. But if you have to lose too much to get what you want, forget it.

This money thing makes us very nasty to each other. There's lots of resentment. She resents that I don't want to work harder to make more money. I resent her for wanting me to change my lifestyle so she can have what she wants. And all this resentment leads to punishing-type actions. You know, screw him if he doesn't want to cooperate and so on and so on.

I really think this bickering about finances could eventually do in the marriage. You know, I really don't object to her desires. I just object to being punished for not satisfying them. And the problem isn't really money so much as it is personalities. On a subliminal level, you're always fighting to be the power source in your relationship. And if money was plentiful then we'd both find something else to hassle about.

Another couple, Allen and Beverly, spoke to me about their first encounters with this obstacle. At the time of our interview, they had been married only ten months:

Allen: I had a sense that I was going to marry her pretty early on. It felt pretty solid. We had both had a number of relationships before we met and we both pretty much knew that the next time was going to be the time. You know, we weren't playing around and we had both reached the point where we had some sense of our own vulnerabilities, fuck-ups, dynamics. It was all very adult in the beginning, very mature. But then some of the junk started coming out.

About five months after we met, we were going to Canada, and as we're packing, Beverly all of a sudden started getting crazy about something. I had never lived with someone who started screaming. Screaming, screaming, screaming. It was about whether or not to buy a chicken and she's running her mouth off like a maniac. So I pulled her out of the car and I never found myself wanting so much to absolutely slam the living shit out a woman. So I'm yelling, not realizing all the time I'm becoming a bigger nut. I had gotten angry before and I had

screamed and I had gotten hysterical but I never had anyone become a nut and turn me into one. And that's what began to creep into our relationship. We had already worked through a lot of stuff in order to be honest together but there was a lot more stuff to get into.

Beverly: My getting crazy with the chicken wasn't just my getting crazy with the chicken. It was me reacting to something in Allen and him reacting back. Allen goes through periods that are kind of immersions in work but in a way they don't feel just like an immersion in work. They feel like a real pushing away of me. And it always happens right before we're about to take a big vacation. There'll be two weeks when we're supposed to be getting maps, packing, but somehow it just so happens Allen has a mammoth project to finish. And he's literally up twenty-four hours a day for two weeks.

One of the things we've discovered about some of the anger that goes back and forth between us--and often it's really crazy and rageful like the chicken incident--is that it's our way of getting away from ourselves. The rage that's generated is from things I don't want to deal with about myself or what Allen doesn't want to deal with about himself. Getting angry is just a way of getting away from our own skins.

My research has shown me that most couples tend to fight about very similar issues--money, sex, social plans, in-laws, housework. These are the sorts of issues that ignite fights. I watched one husband, for example, yell at his wife for being too generous. She had bought, he felt, a too-lavish gift for a friend's birthday. I watched another husband become enraged because his wife arranged a social engagement with people he did not like. And I watched one young husband practically go berserk when his wife mentioned she wanted her widowed mother to visit for the weekend.

These are volatile issues for any relationship. But what

is important to know is that these seemingly external issues, if traced back far enough, can be seen to have highly explosive fuses--fuses originating in each of our deepest and most vulnerable parts: The Anger Obstacle is exacerbated by external issues. Its most flammable fuel, though, is more subterranean.

A fight about money, for instance, I saw in many men, usually was not just a fight about money. No. Fighting about money often quickly ignites much deeper issues; namely, a man's deepest feelings of being inadequate in the world. This sense of inadequacy, this feeling of being unsuccessful or unambitious, is what then excessively fuels many marital battles: Not wanting to look at his feelings of inadequacy, a man will simply choose to rant and rave about his wife's spendthrift habits.

Sometimes, too, a fight about money will be nothing but a way for a man to keep the Extinction Obstacle at bay. Many couples, when they first begin to talk about pooling their financial resources, often end up arguing about money. But what is really causing these money fights is each partner's inner battle with autonomy and dependency. Money, in these cases, just becomes symbolic of these deeper issues--of resisting or surrendering to an intimate relationship.

Fights about sex are similarly deceptive. Couples who fight about sex are not usually fighting just about sex. One man I interviewed, a thirty-year-old commercial photographer,

explained it this way:

Our biggest conflict is a sexual conflict. The problem really is that we have no sexual relationship at the moment. I know that Janet just doesn't feel like having sex right now and so I don't even bother making advances anymore.

We used to look at it as just a sexual problem and so I attributed all my anger at her as being caused by this bottled-up sexuality. But now I know it's deeper than that. I'll tell you: I can live with having no sex, at least for a while longer. But what I can't live with is the feeling that Janet's rejecting me because she thinks I'm a creep.

This man's constant rage at his girlfriend was obviously being triggered by something much more potent than being sexually rejected by her. His rage clearly had its most explosive roots in his deeper-level feelings that he was worthless and inept.

Sexual rejection is always painful. But when it is excruciatingly connected to our most vulnerable parts, when it so easily can tip the scales of our self-esteem, then it is often unbearable. And many men, in order to avoid that pain, simply cover it all over with a blind and boundless rage: That anger allows men some brief moments of power or temporary relief, when what they are really experiencing is utter vulnerability.

Anger and its Relation to Vulnerability

Anger and vulnerability are bedmates. In his very first battles with the Extinction Obstacle and the Fusion Obstacle,

a man will use anger as a powerful smoke-screen, as a way to avoid experiencing either his own growing vulnerability to a woman or else his own inadequacies. But even later on, after a couple's first rounds with the Extinction Obstacle have subsided, this deep link between anger and vulnerability persists. As a thirty-two-year-old clinical psychologist--speaking about his own marital relationship--observed:

We've already had three divorces. One lasted three-and-a-half days. It was horrible. You know, when you can't get off the phone but when you're yelling at each other. You're seething but you can't get off the damn phone: When it's "I can't hang up on her--she'll call me back anyway--so if I try to hang up on her and the fight's not settled, well, I'm not going to be able to do my work anyway." It's terrible--terrible because there's just something in those moments when you realize you're not autonomous in this world. There's somebody linked into your guts at a very primitive level and if you don't get it OK with them, then nothing else is going to work. You realize you're totally helpless.

I spent an evening with a couple once, and right from the start there was a palpable tension between them. Apparently they had been fighting all day. During dinner, whenever something had to be negotiated between them, it immediately became a fight: Putting their four-year-old daughter to sleep degenerated into a heated debate between two conflicting schools of child-rearing. The main course, too, was no longer a meal but rather a competitive culinary battleground. Their animosity was so intense for each other that at one point it all just erupted; and in a moment of deep and rageful anger, the husband screamed, "You're

disaffecting from me and I can't stand it."

That was it. There was nowhere else to go with all the anger after that. He had touched his anger's deepest strata--vulnerability. He was not mad at his wife's behaviorist methods of child-rearing. Nor was he disgusted with her penchant for overspicing souffles. No. He was enraged because he felt she was losing love for him.

Once he had touched that deepest level of his rage, he could begin to feel all the emotional pain, the pain his anger had been covering up. Sitting in his chair, teary-eyed, he was no longer ranting and raving at his wife, but only experiencing his fears about her waning love. He was no longer repelling his wife with his vitriolic attacks; she could then walk over to him and try to comfort him. Their fight could end, in other words, once the deepest levels of his anger had been reached.

Fights, of course, do not always magically end this way. A man's simply reaching the point where he is experiencing his insecurities, not just his anger, does not guarantee that his wife or girlfriend will capitulate. What it does guarantee, though, are much better odds that if she wants to, she can make peace.

I watched another man argue with a woman he had been living with for many years. During a lull in their heated fighting, the woman turned to me and soberly mentioned that perhaps it was her boyfriend's jealousy and his too-close

ties to his family that were causing a lot of the problems in their relationship. Her statement, a reflective comment meant to be constructive and conciliatory, ignited her boyfriend. All of a sudden, he started verbally attacking her, dredging up every weakness he had ever seen in her: Her too-fused relationship with an older sibling, her social awkwardness, her dependence on a therapist. It was very clear, by the suddenness and by the viciousness of his attack, that he was unable to reflect on the deeper issues she had brought up--his jealousy and his close ties to his parents.

Most men use anger to avoid looking at their own deepest emotional turmoils and vulnerabilities. It is simply a lot easier for a man to get angry at his wife or girlfriend than for him to try to understand himself and how he is contributing to his relationship's difficulties.

Women, too, use anger to avoid looking at themselves. This process, whereby we ignore our own inner tensions and blame everything on our spouses, is, therefore, rampant in intimate relationships. "The tendency to impose internal tensions on the on the perceived external world," Dr. David Shapiro (1965) states, "is universal" (p. 68). This process too, is why so many fights become repetitive and seemingly unending in a marriage.

Unfortunately, it is very hard to spot this blaming process as it operates in a relationship. It works very

subtly. One man I interviewed, for instance, was at a wedding. At the wedding, his wife began talking to another man. This other man and the wife of the man I interviewed--both of them passionate show-tune lovers--soon began singing the scores from Oklahoma! and Carousel. But after half-an-hour, the man I interviewed just could not contain his mounting feelings of jealousy any longer. Grabbing his wife, pushing her beyond the crowds, he finally lashed out at her for being excessively flirtatious.

His wife may have been flirtatious; perhaps even excessively so. But by reviling her for her flirtatiousness, he was also totally ignoring--in fact, not even mentioning--his own unmanageable feelings of jealousy: His torrents of abusive and self-righteous anger simply made it impossible for his wife to even mention his jealousy. (The psychological dynamics of jealousy will be examined in greater depth in the following chapter.)

By excessively blaming our mates, we often end up avoiding looking at ourselves. In that process, we distort what is really wrong in our love relationships. It is always our mates who are at fault, always our mates who are petty or selfish or too dependent or not dependent enough.

Emotional Passivity as an Expression of Anger

Clearly, anger can be a way for a man to avoid dealing with his most frightening and bedrock emotional issues. But there is an even worse and, unfortunately, all too common avoidance mechanism men employ. They retreat. And they retreat not only from their softer and more vulnerable feelings but from their most intense feelings of anger, as well. As a result, they end up becoming emotionally detached, interpersonally withdrawn, and extremely passive in their romantic relationships. One man I interviewed confided with pathetic bravado, that he once "didn't talk to [my] wife for six months."

Why do men opt for this sort of passive retreat? Because by becoming so emotionally withdrawn, they can accomplish two things: They can avoid examining their deepest torments and insecurities; and, by using this withdrawing technique, they can transform their wives into constant nags. A woman who is emotionally invested in a remote man can do only one of two things: She can either withdraw from her husband (as well as from her own deepest self) or she can constantly pester her husband for some genuine display of emotion. In either case, she loses, becoming either invisible or a nag.

One woman I spoke with explained how she let herself become invisible in a relationship with a withdrawn man:

My relationship with my husband had always been very non-communicative, quiet, hostile, and

superficial. I was definitely in love with him but very unhappy sexually which I blamed him for. I couldn't get any sexual satisfaction in our relationship and I had suggested he go for help. But I didn't push hard enough, so we just kind of rolled along. It was just the kind of thing where we should have done a lot more talking to each other. It was strange. He was easy-going. He never got angry. We never yelled at each other. We just simmered. And I'd never told anybody that I wasn't terribly happy.

A man I interviewed, aware of his tendency to emotionally withdraw whenever his wife broached a volatile subject, told me:

Maybe I stay with my wife because there are times when I think she's absolutely fantastic, but when she becomes a shrew I could kill her. For instance, last night. We had had a perfectly nice weekend. Yesterday afternoon we went to see a play and then over dinner, she started getting shrewy. We didn't quarrel; we just went home and each of us withdrew. I went into the den and watched the basketball game and then went to sleep, and she was in bed by nine o'clock.

Not surprisingly, many of the men I interviewed saw themselves as the calm and sane partner in their romantic relationships, their wives or girlfriends, of course, becoming the nonstop, hysterical complainers. "She's always bitching about something" was the most frequent complaint I heard about women from men. As one man, attempting to "fairly" appraise his failed marriage, said:

I'd say I have to take at least fifty percent of the blame for how the marriage went. If I'd been more together, I wouldn't have stood for a lot of the crap she doled out. I never told her what I was feeling. I was always assuming the short end of the stick. I was just too passive. I let myself be a schmuck for a pretty face.

Again, what most men did not want to see was their contribution to this transformation: That it was their own withdrawn and passive styles that had made "complainers" of their wives or girlfriends. As one woman, a fifty-two-year-old nursery school teacher, confided:

The real problem and the real reason why my relationship with my husband had to change was that there was no relationship. There were no arguments but there needed to be arguments Arthur, like his mother, was very proud of the fact that people couldn't argue with him. He boasted about that. You couldn't pick an argument with him. He wanted to hear no criticism, no violence, no anger. He'd say, "What's so bad? Why are you so unhappy? What's the matter? I'm a perfectly good husband. I support you, a lovely home, two-car garage, PTA, healthy children. What's wrong? . . ." So I became the crazy one while he just refused to look at anything.

Another woman, a sixty-four-year-old widow, had a similar story to tell:

We quarreled a great deal. I say we quarreled an awful lot but with Victor you couldn't really quarrel. That was one of the frustrating things about him: He was so closemouthed that the minute you tried to argue with him he'd withdraw or walk out. He just never showed any signs of anger. You know, you had to tear the walls apart before you got any response to your anger.

This sort of passive or nonengaged pose--this pose so many men use to cope with their intimate relationships--is, again, nothing more than a suppression of the Anger Obstacle. In their waking lives, these men have adopted this more remote or pseudo-cooperative stance toward their wives or girlfriends. But their fantasies, as well as their nightly dreams, are often filled with a ghoulish compendium of woman-

hating and woman-maiming images. "Passivity," the writer William Lederer (1968) says, "is often a defense against aggression" (p. 219).

These remote men, beneath the surface, are sitting atop a keg of highly explosive and invariably misdirected anger at their mates. Who these men are really mad at is their parents and themselves. More than likely, they are mad at their parents for never having given them the emotional strength and confidence needed to sustain a genuinely intimate relationship. And they are mad at themselves because, deep down, they have glimpsed their own inadequacy and unhappiness.

It is important not to give the impression that men are the sole incompetents in romantic relationships. Any relationship, any romantically-involved couple, is a "system," a unit with its own very defined patterns of interaction. As Dr. Don Jackson (1968), the late and noted family therapist observed:

Marriage is a fluid relationship between two spouses and their two individual systems of behavior. The totality of marriage, is determined by how the spouses behave in relation to each other" (p. 6).

We are not two discrete individuals, then, in a marriage or in a newly-forming romantic relationship. According to systems theorists (Jackson, 1968; Minuchin, 1974; Watzlawick, 1974) who we are once we enter into an intimate relationship, begins to be very much determined by who our spouses are and by how they behave. So clearly, to impute blame solely to

one member of a dyadic system is to too narrowly view the often complex and interdependent dynamics of a romantic relationship. Nevertheless, I have chosen in this dissertation to focus on the psychological obstacles men encounter in intimate relationships.

Suggested Antidotes

There is a word talk-show hosts, clergymen, and marriage counselors all love. It is a simple word, especially considering it is one of the few weapons we have against the Anger Obstacle. The word is communication.

During the past ten years, there has been a proliferation of marital therapies whose intent is to facilitate "communication" between embattled spouses. "Communication skills training," "fight fair workshops," "couples contracting workshops" have all been developed. Each of these psychological first-aid kits was designed to slow two people down so they could examine, in a more neutral and noninflammatory setting, their relationship's most volatile interactions.

These weekend workshops and short-term therapies are useful. I have met many couples who have been helped by them. Nevertheless, I feel a cautionary note is needed: All of us need to know that, bottom line, you cannot rebuild a relationship--you cannot learn how to "communicate"--in a

single marathon therapy weekend. At best, you might be able to see how much hatred and anger actually exist between you and your spouse in one of these intensive couples weekends. You might even glimpse the love that has so long been absent from your relationship--which, no doubt, will create its own profound but ultimately short-lived euphoria. But as to restructuring a love relationship and learning how to communicate, these just are not feats that are typically accomplished in two or three days. They are often slow, painstaking processes.

My wife and I tried a number of these "communication" methods, these "fighting fair" techniques. We even devised some of our own. We once invented a game called "Tougee-Tougee." In the midst of a fight, if either one of us remembered to initiate the game, then both of us were bound, by a ceremonial handshake, to play it. The game consisted of the two of us tagging each other and then running around the house like spastics, all the while yelling the meaningless word "Tougee-Tougee." We were hoping that invoking this ridiculous game in the midst of an interminable battle, we might derail some of our seemingly boundless rage.

The game often worked: If what we were fighting about was not terribly combustible, the game helped to dislodge our anger. But if things already had escalated to too volatile a place, "Tougee-Tougee" was useless.

There were other stratagems we concocted in our attempt

to de-claw the Anger Obstacle. If we were on the verge of a fight, we agreed that one of us could leave the house (or wherever else we were fighting) for thirty minutes. After thirty minutes, we had to return home and talk about whatever precipitated the argument. We then had an hour to figure things out. If an hour passed and we still had not gotten anywhere, we would drop the fight, each of us going our separate ways.

These rules all helped. They allowed us to cool down a bit so we could talk more sanely about our problems: We knew that if we could stop being venomous rivals, we had a better chance of settling our differences. If we could somehow stop blaming each other, at least we could start hearing what the other had to say.

But however useful these games and fighting rules proved, they were--ultimately--only secondary defenses in battling the Anger Obstacle. In our relationship, and in almost all romantic relationships, the major assault came--and must come--from a series of hard inner battles. These are the inner battles every man and every woman must wage within himself or herself. "There are no panaceas and no substitutes," Dr. Robert Seidenberg (1973), the author of Marriage Between Equals, says, "for the work and agony involved in the confrontation of one's history" (p. 172). There is just no way around the difficult task of self-exploration. If what we are after are mutually satisfying

romantic relationships, then each one of us needs to do his or her inner homework.

This "inner homework"--which I will be writing more about in Chapter IX of this dissertation--is what allows a couple to fight fairly. It is what allows them to discern the real underlying issues behind a fight, thereby obviating debilitating surface tensions. And it is what allows them to be not defensive, but instead, able to hear what their mate is saying, even in the midst of a heated battle.

A number of the men I interviewed had looked beyond their anger and into their murkier parts. They were attempting to see how they contributed to the problems in their love relationships. But most of the men I interviewed wanted--at all costs--to avoid this sort of self-examination. They had chosen, instead, anger as a powerful smokescreen. But by doing that, they had also driven away the one thing they really wanted and needed in their lives: The love and caring of a woman.

Instead of forming emotionally meaningful relationships, a lot of men (but again, especially young men) seek out women because they are in search of a sex object, or because they want to be narcissistically fed, or because they need a temporary maternal haven--some soft place to momentarily deposit their loneliness. Most men, simply, are not looking for truly intimate, committed relationships.

The tragedy in our culture is that women too often fail

to know this, blinded as they are by their own legitimate (but sometimes overwhelming) needs for nurturance: Most of the women I interviewed (roughly thirty) therefore, wanted more from their relationships than men did. They were looking for something other than a hit-and-run type of relationship. They were looking for relationships that could touch and involve their personalities' deeper parts.

This naturally proved painful for many women because often the men they were involved with--some of these men because they were afraid, others because they were ignorant of the potential emotional depths of a romantic relationship--just could not give these women what they wanted. Indeed, too often, all these men could give to women was their pent-up rage and confusion.

CHAPTER VI

THE JEALOUSY OBSTACLE

Operational Definitions

Some jealousy, of course, is a natural component of any love relationship. "The lover who is not jealous," the twelfth-century writer Capallanus said, "is not a true lover" (Seidenberg, 1973, p. 119).

"Jealousy is an expected affect of living," Dr. Robert Seidenberg (1973) confirms. "If someone is precious to us, we must have a modicum of jealousy as basic cement," (p. 103).

But when this basic cement becomes a sinking weight that plummets a man deeper and deeper into the frightening waters of his own hostility, inadequacy, and fear, then it is no longer a tame part of love. Jealousy, at this point, starts becoming associated with paranoia and possessiveness.

I interviewed the twenty-eight-year-old owner of a movie house in Philadelphia. His recent and excruciating war with the Jealousy Obstacle had left him, he told me, a "shadow of my former self." "I was wasted by it," he said. "I was ruined. I lost weight. I was pale and shaky. I was constantly upset. And I didn't know how to get out of this state."

After a four-year involvement with a woman, he was--when I interviewed him--living alone again and "just trying to develop some inner confidence."

His story (included here almost in its entirety) very dramatically captures the psychological turmoil of the Jealousy Obstacle.

Our first year was fantastic. Fantastic communication. It was one of the only relationships I'd ever really wanted. It wasn't something casual in my mind. I wanted the relationship to last. I wanted us to stay together, to live together, to have a kid. The whole works. Those were my kinds of feelings. I began to feel for the first time that the whole thing--living with someone--could be something other than deadly.

So she was opening me up emotionally with all of our talking and communication. And I was opening her up sexually. That was just such an ego rush for me. She had been with other men but none of the sex had ever been good. She gave me insane confidence. At the time when I felt good with her, I was really bouncy and happy. I was just really letting myself go. But then, she started seeing this other man and I was just thrown into the pits. My ego was just slammed into the wall. I hid. I went away. I disappeared. I just stopped visiting people. I was tightening up. It was an incredible loss. I felt ashamed. When she started seeing someone else, I felt inadequate--inadequate in many ways. And I also felt that this guy she was seeing had a star personality and I didn't.

It all happened very fast. One night, she met a guy and I saw them go into her house together. And right away I was very upset. I wasn't used to seeing her with other people and I just reacted. I immediately said to her that she could do whatever she wanted to do. I was reacting more on what my value systems were. You know, I intellectually felt that it was OK for us to see other people. I felt, who was I to stop her from seeing others? Yet, in practicality, we were both monogamous. This was the first time it was actually questioned. So I reacted fairly OK that first night. But I reacted from my

mind, not from what I was really feeling, which was just outrage, anger, frustration.

I remember I had to go away for a few days and when I returned, she came up to see me and told me that she saw Bob again and that they'd gone out to dinner and that they'd slept together. And I was just destroyed. She was telling me this because we'd always been honest with each other. She was just trying to be as casual and honest and as open as she could. I don't think there was any ill intent on her part. It was just like this-is-what-happened-and-I-have-to-tell-you. I immediately interpreted it that she was being so fucking callous. You know, I'm crushed, I'm trembling, and there I was inside a projection room of a movie theater, having to stand there for the next six hours showing movies. I was all alone. And being in that booth is like being in solitary. You know, in the best of conditions, being in a projection booth isn't the best place to spend six hours. But to be having this thing eating at me in that booth was too much.

I want to tell you, I was hurt. I was hurt because I felt I was inadequate, that I wasn't satisfying her. And I was very willing to criticize myself about that. I probably have a great innate tendency in that direction anyway. I was really hurt--my image, my self. And my work, owning a small movie theater, was becoming difficult at the time. The theater had money problems and all, so I wasn't having any other satisfactions in my life other than this relationship. The relationship was my joy.

And this guy that Bonnie was with really hit me hard. It was the sort of thing where I felt that I underachieved but I felt that this person was really an achiever. He's like a graduate of Cal Tech in physics and he's got a master's in physics, and he was going for his second master's in astronomy. He was an achiever and I felt so out-classed. And another thing that really hit hard was that she said she was going down to the Caribbean with him, and I felt like, "Wow, I can't do any of this stuff." First of all, I didn't have the money. And I just felt so washed under.

I was very confrontational. I didn't know what to do. I didn't know if I should like attack this guy, burn his car, or get a samurai sword and come

through his window at night. And I did some of these weird things, too. I came up to them in the middle of the night when they were in bed together and I'd pound on the door. I actually came sneaking up one night--but they weren't there. I had this incredible vision of somebody dying and I had a knife and it was just lucky that no one was there. And I'd be walking around the streets at four o'clock in the morning, walking alone and feeling crushed. Just insane.

I finally told her I just couldn't see her anymore. It was too painful for me to see her. I was real confused I was really sick at heart when we left each other, deeply sick about the whole thing. And I just wasn't getting satisfied. My friends, other women--nobody seemed able to satisfy me. There was so much unhappiness. And then I'd feel that, you know, life is too short. So I'd go back and see her. But then I'd run away again. So I'd see her a little bit and we'd go out a few times, but then, invariably we'd get into some conflict.

Finally, last February, I said to her that I've been doing this back-and-forth relationship long enough. Now I really have to walk away from it. There was still a lot of pain, and I said to her some really horrible things one night--that we never had a really good relationship, that we never talked to each other, that she was actually dishonest. And we both reacted very painfully and we ran away from each other. And I didn't see her for quite a while after that.

Then, I met her one day walking with Bob. And my reaction for a long time to this guy was like I just didn't want him in my sight. Anytime I'd ever be physically close to him, I'd just be in a tense posture. I mean, I felt quite willing to kill him. And that's a whole other thing--dealing with violent emotions like that. But finally I got to the place where I could look at him when he was with her and be able to say "hi." You know, that was pretty hard. It took me a long time to get to that.

I feel that now I'm in a process of sitting back and watching things. I'm working on myself. For a while I was just going after relationships and I didn't know what the hell I wanted. You know, I was knocking around in absurd ways and getting no satisfaction. Now I'm trying to come out of that

and I'm starting to feel that the world is not this hustle, this difficult thing; that it's just there and it can be OK. I still feel pretty hurt and alone sometimes, but I think I'm ready to experience things again.

Jealousy can obviously provoke a gauntlet of difficult feelings--anger, pain, a crisis of self-esteem. At its worst, as in the interview you just read, it can precipitate an inner avalanche, a man's entire sense of himself caving in. These are very frightening feelings. Understandably, they can lead a man to taking desperate measures. A man in the throes of the Jealousy Obstacle needs something, anything, to regain a sense of himself.

If not drugs and alcohol (or in combination with these substances), men impaled on the razor-sharp horns of the Jealousy Obstacle will usually turn to one (or all) of the following to grab hold of some last shred of cohesiveness: Violence, paranoia, or possessiveness.

In the case of the movie house owner, he had resorted to violence in his worst moments of despair and inner disintegration. Another man I interviewed told me how he had become a "CIA agent" because of jealousy. He was totally paranoid, thinking his wife was having an affair with a man she had once briefly mentioned was attractive. This man began following his wife to work, listening to all her phone calls, incessantly interrogating her. And another man I spoke with, similarly caught on the fanged claws of the Jealousy Obstacle, had become utterly, maniacally possessive.

He had refused to let his wife out of their house. For two days, he barricaded her in a room. When the woman's brother finally freed her, this man was taken to a hospital for psychiatric observation.

The Psychology of Jealousy

Why is it that jealousy mildly irks some men while it savagely destroys others? Why can some couples even use it as a way to get their relationship out of a boring phase--as a way to re-kindle interest in one another--while other couples are consumed by even a small dosage?

Simply stated, it is a man's degree of insecurity that is the determinant to how much jealousy he (and, therefore, any relationship he is in) can tolerate. A very insecure man will crumble at the slightest glimmer that his wife is interested in another man. He may even paranoically concoct that glimmer, if he is that dependent on his wife. I have seen men become irrationally enraged at their girlfriends or at their spouses for talking just a little too long to another man--even if that man was a close friend or relative.

Insecure men are utterly unhinged by this obstacle because at some very primal level, they sense that their wives are all they have. With little meaning in their work lives and with generally estranged relationships with friends and fellow workers, these men are nearly totally dependent on

their wives and mates--dependent on them for a sense of inner security. Understandably, if someone shows even the remotest signs of affection for their mates (may it be a man or a woman), these men immediately become wary.

Jealousy, as Margaret Mead (1931) observed, "is not a barometer by which depth of love can be read; it merely records the degree of the lover's insecurity" (p. 41).

Jealousy and its Relation to Self-Doubt

As in the case with anger, men often unconsciously employ jealousy as a means of avoiding their most unwieldy doubts about themselves. Intense jealousy, therefore, is often a plea from a man's deepest self to look at his darkest pockets of self-denigration, as well as at his deepest uncertainties about his desirability to women.

It is interesting to note, given this recurring interrelationship between jealousy and self-doubts, that some researchers (Constantine and Constantine, 1973; Smith and Smith, 1974) feel that jealousy is a function of age. That is, as people grow older, these researchers claim, the issue of jealousy becomes less flammable. As the Constantines (1973) have written (based on their studies on multilateral relations):

Jealousy was . . . a function of age: all respondents under age thirty-one listed jealousy as a problem, but only nine of fifteen over thirty-one years old did. This was highly significant . . .

and suggested that in this context, non-jealousy and maturity may be related, a suggestion later supported by interviews and prolonged interaction with groups. (pp. 84-85)

If aging includes either conquering or coming to terms with one's self-doubts, then it makes sense that older, more mature people will have less difficulties with the Jealousy Obstacle. My own research corroborates this premise: As a man finds his way in the world, as he establishes himself in his profession and in his community, his battles with this obstacle, I observed, generally deintensify. Several of the middle-aged men I interviewed told me how jealousy had become a peripheral issue for them. Many of these men, though, had fiercely grappled with this obstacle in their early and mid-twenties.

Many of the men I interviewed shared with me their realization that jealousy was directly related to their self-doubts. They further acknowledged that the men they felt the most jealousy towards were often men who had achieved (or who they felt had achieved) the very goals they themselves sought. A fledgling sports announcer told me:

I could handle my wife talking to a lot of the guys I work with. But one guy, a guy who was only a few years older than me, well, I never like it when she's nice to him. He's a sports announcer, too. Maybe that threatens me.

It is important to note, too, that many of the men I interviewed admitted feeling jealousy towards their mate's women friends. It is very common, I found, for a man to both envy and resent the friendships his wife or girlfriend has

with other women. Men generally do not like to admit this. Many men see this as very weak. It is, in some ways, noble to be jealous of another man. But when the object of jealousy is a woman, men feel too vulnerable and too at odds with their idealized self-images. This jealousy towards their mate's women friends is a difficult issue for men to overcome precisely because it is so difficult for them to admit its existence.

C H A P T E R V I I

THE TIME OBSTACLE

Definition

The Extinction Obstacle, the Fusion Obstacle, the Anger Obstacle, and the Jealousy Obstacle are typically obstacles who live in the early stages of a love relationship; each of them, as I have already shown, thriving in the undernourished soils of a man's inner emotional emptiness. But as a man and a woman negotiate their relationship--as they begin to figure out some of its complexities--these obstacles will usually lose some of their original strength. One obstacle, though, the Time Obstacle, unlike any of these other obstacles, can in many situations become more and more treacherous as a relationship ages.

This Time Obstacle is not as flashy as any of the other obstacles. It works much more like slowly corroding rust than a bolt of rageful or jealous lightning. But it is as potent as any of these other obstacles, and probably destroys more relationships.

After a few years of marriage, a lot of couples think they can put their marriages on some kind of automatic pilot. Husbands especially feel they can leave their "solid" marriages on hold, and then attend to what really needs tending to--their careers, their self-growth, their

children's educations, their five-year economic plans. But I have seen too many marriages too quickly nose-dive once this sort of automatic pilot is thrown into gear.

Typically, at the beginning of a relationship, both partners want to spend a lot of time together. "The urge for great amounts of togetherness," says Dr. Don Jackson (1968), "is par for the course in the courtship phase of a relationship" (p. 93). This is when two people are first discovering each other. It is when the thrill of their mutual appreciation is so electric. But these initial jolts of ego-affirming electricity inevitably de-intensify. And nine out of ten times it is men who first experience this de-intensification and who then return to the workaday world. Again, as Dr. Don Jackson (1968) writes:

A man spends a lot of time with a woman in courtship. But afterwards, he devotes a lot of time to his work, telling his wife it's for their mutual welfare. But that's a shift that needs to be worked out. (p. 95)

Careerism and its Relation to the Time Obstacle

So men, in the course of a love relationship, tend to shift their primary focus from their wives to their work. Given our culture, it is an understandable shift: Considering the economic responsibilities all of us have to meet, coupled with the fact that we all derive so much of our self-esteem and self-worth from our work, it is not only

understandable, it is logical. But what is not logical is that so many men, at some point in their relationships, lose a truly significant amount of interest in their wives or girlfriends.

How is this possible? How can men who once loved being with their wives end up often seriously neglecting them?

A thirty-four-year-old lawyer from Chicago spoke to me about his battles with the Time Obstacle. His comments help answer the question:

When Denise and I first met, I just wanted to be with her all the time. We'd hang out in bed all day. It was an effort to even get out of bed for food. But after a while, I just didn't feel like it was enough.

Friends of mine were telling me how they'd just scored fifty-thou on some fast real estate deal; and another friend was a big-wig producer in Hollywood. I just felt if I didn't make my move, I'd be left behind.

That's when I started putting in fifteen-hour days at the office . . . I remember driving home one night. I was really exhausted. When I finally pulled my car into the driveway, I just fell asleep. The next morning, I ran into the house, brushed my teeth, and drove right back to work.

I thought our relationship could handle that sort of stuff. But one night, I came home and Denise had written me this long note. Basically, she said if I didn't cool it, she wanted out.

I couldn't stop, though. It was like this thing was over my head. I felt this pressure to perform, to be recognized. Maybe it's a cultural thing, I don't know. Or maybe it has something to do with my family; being the youngest son, I wanted to show my father I could make it big in the world.

When Denise finally left, I was making about eighty-thou a year; and that's a hot-shot lawyer by most people's standards. But now its like--what's

the difference if I make thirty-five or seventy-five a year? I'm telling you, I really thought that was the most important thing--making money, being recognized. And I guess it is. Worldly accomplishments make a big difference. Just not when they're at the expense of your closest relationship.

This lawyer's relationship, like many men's relationships, suffered from an unchecked careerism: He could not keep his work life and his love life balanced.

It is a classic dilemma, especially for men who are in their late twenties and thirties. This is the time when a man is trying to gain some economic foothold in the world, when his deepest ambitious urges are sprinting toward whatever finish line he has set for himself. It is difficult for a man at this stage of his life to tame these wild horses of ambition.

For some men, the finish line they set for themselves is strictly monetary. They want to be earning a certain amount of money by the time they are, say, in their mid-forties. For other men, their finish line is winning a prestigious award, or a research grant, or a well-endowed teaching chair. For still other men, their goal is buying a summer cottage near the ocean or an antique sports car. Whatever a man's dream, it is generally during his twenties and thirties that he is most intensely going after it.

The fact that this is also the stage of life when many men are now choosing to get married has made this Time Obstacle treacherous. The balancing act between career and

marriage has always been problematic. But today, with so many men marrying for the first time in their late twenties and thirties, this obstacle has become nothing less than ferocious. And, unfortunately, as case history after case history reveals, a man's love life, not his career, suffers most when this career/marriage balance is toppled.

A widow in her mid-sixties, reflecting on her thirty-three-year marriage, had this to say regarding the Time Obstacle:

I was desperately in love with my husband and many times that was totally frustrating. I think all the external evidences of his loving me were there. He was most loyal and most attentive, a sweet person. But his intense involvement with himself and his dedication to his work were the dominant forces. Most of his energies went into the creative aspects of the business. Once he told me he wanted to prove to his father that he could be a better businessman than his father had been.

Psychological Dynamics of Careerism

A man's inner life is filled with what I call "self-esteem spot checks." In their inner monologues with themselves, as well as in their conversations with others, men will frequently assess what they have attained (or what they have not yet attained) in their lives. A research psychologist, for example, will talk to both himself and to others about the professional journals he has had articles in; a documentary filmmaker, about the awards he has garnered. To varying degrees, men will tell their wives,

their friends, and themselves about the progress they are making toward their life goals. This inner tally sheet then very often determines how buoyant or how depressed a man feels about himself.

In moderation, these self-esteem spot checks are useful. They can help a man stay on course, to not waver from what he has decided are his realistic goals. But, too often, what happens is that these spot checks wind up becoming compulsive: Men, at this point, are more like shopkeepers who have to take complete inventories after every item they sell. They become compulsive careerists, their sense of well-being completely dependent on the daily fluctuations of their careers.

These spot checks--once gentle and useful reminders to stay on some chosen course--can just too quickly end up becoming driven and perfectionistic inner voices, voices blindly fueling a man's workaholism and careerism. It is at this point that love relationships are most susceptible to the Time Obstacle.

To some degree, almost all the men I interviewed for this study suffered from careerism. Living in our society it is hard to avoid. Ours is a culture, as any copy of People magazine instantly makes clear, that glorifies success. It is very difficult, therefore, for a man to maintain his marriage as a priority in our culture. Again, the pull toward worldly success is just too fierce: Bottom line, it

is material success, and not marital bliss, that all of us, as a society, encourage and reward. This shift from marriage to career, then, is practically unavoidable. But what can be avoided, and what every marriage needs to avoid, is having that shift run amuck.

Antidote to the Time Obstacle

There is one way to ensure a marriage against the potential damages of the Time Obstacle and that is by paying attention to it. Very simply, if you do not pay attention to your relationship, if you are constantly preoccupied, say, with a career, then you just may not have a relationship after a while.

One of the major tasks in any marriage, therefore, is to pay attention to it. But the task happens to be one of the hardest because it involves consciously putting aside time, each day or each week, to do that. One couple, in their mid-fifties, after nearly succumbing to this obstacle, finally learned this truism: Namely, that marriage partners need to make time for their marriages.

Jonathan: Over the course of our marriage, I'd get really involved in some work-related project and really excited about it. And if Claire wasn't involved, I'd kind of lose interest in her. At those times, I'd feel that the relationship wasn't that important and I'd take it for granted. And then home would just be a place to come back to to change clothes. But because of her strength, Claire's always brought me back to re-appreciating what we have.

Claire: During these various crises, I'd make us talk more seriously about the two of us spending more time together. Every summer on vacation we'd make these great plans, these vows that next year we weren't going to get so busy, that we were going to spend more time going out to dinner, to plays, things like that. Then, on our vacation the following year, we'd end up saying the same thing.

At a certain point, I think you just have to grab hold of the reins of your marriage. Otherwise, it'll get away from you.

Marriages can wither away from emotional neglect. A genuine effort of the will is needed to prevent this from happening. Otherwise, the insidious Time Obstacle will undermine even the strongest of marital bonds.

Putting aside time each week for a relationship seems simple. And it is. But its effects are profound. By structuring into a week inviolable islands of time for couples to be together--hours with none of the usual intruders (phones, friends, TV, children)--relationships instantly start changing. As one woman told me:

My husband and I were happy and satisfied with what we had. But there's a kind of intensity that comes with just spending a whole day or a whole evening not concerned with anything but each other.

What happens in most marriages is there is barely enough time--because people do not make that time--to be together, especially in any meaningful way. Most couples, according to several recent surveys, spend less than thirty minutes a day together (Pietropinto, 1981, p. 446). And in thirty minutes (those thirty minutes usually coming after a depleting day of work and child care), it is just about impossible to

intimately re-connect to your mate.

Real intimacy requires time, time that couples need to set aside for themselves. They need to share at least some of the small bruises all of us incur during any given day--those petty resentments we all feel toward our bosses, our children, our auto mechanics, and toward our spouses.

Once those daily concerns, those inevitable bruises, are shared and filed away, spouses can then begin sharing more long-range preoccupations and dreams. And beyond that--beyond all those daily and not-so-daily concerns--they can start enjoying other and richer levels of intimacy--love-making, affectionate baby talk, unfettered play.

But again, what happens in too many relationships is that there is barely enough time to work through even that first batch of daily bruises. Should it come as any surprise, then, when many years later, a couple is asking themselves in a therapist's office, "Where did our love go?"--a love that was there for them when they used to spend every extra moment together at the beginning of their relationship?

It is important to point out that when emotionally distant couples finally start giving their relationship the time it needs, tempestuous dynamics sometimes ensue. One man I interviewed explained it this way:

We never had real quarrels in the beginning. Our quarreling started later on when our kids were older. I think that in a lot of marriages you don't have time to really get to know one another. When you have little kids, you're too consumed in just

survival. What happens is that when you're both left naked without the kids, it becomes a hassle.

Summary

The "thrill," the excitement of being together, waxes and wanes in the course of any long-term relationship.

Marriages, moreover, periodically gravitate to emotional nadirs, times when neither spouse is particularly interested in spending time with the other. But by locking in pockets of time, a couple can at least give their relationship the chance it needs to recover from one of these low points.

The demands of any given day--earning a living, cooking, taking care of children, mowing the lawn, socializing--rob a marriage of the hours it needs. Without that time together, though, too many spouses drift apart.

If a relationship does not periodically give itself time to soar, if it does not put aside time each day or each week to re-experience some of its magic--its tenderness, its laughter, its sexual excitement--then all the unavoidable and petty resentments any relationship daily manufactures will start festering. And eventually, these otherwise trivial resentments will undermine even the strongest of marriages.

C H A P T E R V I I I

THE FIDELITY OBSTACLE

Definition

What follows is a case history of a thirty-year-old man. It serves as an introduction to the Fidelity Obstacle.

Handsomely and powerfully built, David recently had completed a graduate degree in engineering. When I interviewed him, again at age thirty, and after two years of marriage, he was about to start his professional life. He was happy his student days were ending. But he was also a little scared to be entering--for the first time really--the nine-to-five world.

At a graduation celebration, he started talking to a woman he had gone through three years of school with. She was one of the eight women in his class of ninety engineering students. Over the years, they had flirted occasionally in study groups and at parties. There had always been, David knew (and he surmised the woman knew), a sexual charge between them. In the three years they had been in the program, however, they had managed to ventilate the heat of that sexual energy by "flirting it away."

But for three weeks prior to this graduation celebration, David had started to become obsessed with this woman. He had spent hours fantasizing about her, sometimes masturbating, he

told me, as much as four or five times a day.

His vivid masturbation fantasies were always the same. In these fantasies, he would be talking to her at a public place--a bar, a party, a classroom. Next, they would give each other some sort of nonverbal message, both of them leaving the room together. Finally, the minute they were back at her house--the moment the door was unlocked--they would be ripping off each other's clothes.

At the graduation celebration--a party given by one of their professors--David began talking to this woman. He could not remember what they spoke about; but after twenty minutes, they excused themselves from the party The minute they were back at her house--the moment the door was unlocked--their clothes were unzipped.

It was "the first time David committed adultery. And it came, as most adulterous episodes do, at a difficult time in his young marriage. His wife, Karen, in the midst of finishing her first year of social work school, was overwhelmed with work--writing papers, seeing clients, meeting her supervisors.

It would be very neat and compact if I could say that Karen's emotional unavailability led to David's affair. This is, of course, sometimes the case: As spouses emotionally and physically drift apart--as the Time Obstacle, in other words, insidiously creeps up on a couple--this Fidelity Obstacle often flourishes. But in David and Karen's

situation, Karen--despite her busy schedule--was always available to David, offering him the support and affirmation he needed during his difficult life transition.

His affair was not triggered by the Time Obstacle. Rather, it was the result of a very deep-rooted and personal torment. He loved his wife. But he just could not reconcile himself to never again sleeping with a new woman.

David had always been very physically attractive. In high school and college, he had slept with dozens of admiring women. His physical attractiveness was a cornerstone upon which a lot of his self-esteem relied. So even after he and Karen had met, he had managed to convince Karen to sexually experiment by adding a third partner to their love-making. On two occasions, Karen tried this arrangement. But she had found it (unfortunately for David) not especially to her liking. She was, she knew, essentially monogamous.

David was hoping that by having an occasional menage a trois, he could satisfy his strong sexual desires and not have to jeopardize his marriage: If he could occasionally share a new lover with Karen, he would not have to seek out clandestine extramarital affairs.

His strong sexual curiosity, coupled with the fact that he had been on the verge of entering the work world and seriously doubting his abilities to make it "out there," had led David to his extramarital affair. It was, simply, a very vulnerable time in his life and he needed to feel he was

still an attractive and desirable man, not just a shaky and fledgling engineer.

To have an affair or not to have an affair? It is a question with which every married man must wrestle. And since men, as a rule, experience the sexual potential in many of their encounters with the opposite sex, the question is an ever-present one. The Fidelity Obstacle, in other words, accompanies men from adolescence to old age. Again, men often have some part of their attention attuned to the sexual possibilities, to the sexual desirability, of any woman they are with. It is sort of a low-grade universal male obsession. The Fidelity Obstacle, therefore, tends (at least at some point) to plague a man's life.

Is it normal for a man to be monogamous, or is it normal for a man to have an affair? Is there some biologically ingrained instinct in men for promiscuity? These are the questions that often get addressed when this topic of marital fidelity is discussed. But what rarely gets addressed is a much more fundamental question: How can a marriage deal with this inevitable obstacle?

Given the fact that all of us--men and women alike--have sexual feelings for people other than our mates, answering this question seems essential. If a marriage is to stay afloat in the often choppy waters of this obstacle, it needs clear-cut directives. Theoretical speculations as to whether or not male promiscuity is a biologically ingrained instinct

can wait.

How to make peace with the Fidelity Obstacle--with this desire we all have to know people of the opposite sex--becomes the crucial question. How to make peace with this obstacle without hiding from it, or running away from it, or lying about it?

It is a very difficult question to answer for any marriage. But an answer does exist. There is a preventive to this obstacle. But unfortunately, most people just are not willing to try it.

Common Psychological Dynamics of Fidelity

There is no denying the thrill of a spontaneous non-obligating sexual liaison. If men knew they could have intense affairs and one-night stands (and if their spouses felt OK about these experiences), their sex lives would be more variegated and probably filled with more moments of sexual abandon. As Dr. Herb Goldberg (1976) writes:

The revitalizing impact of a new sexual partner is widely accepted. Many so-called impotent, passive, or disinterested men find themselves extremely potent with a new partner. (p. 144)

But also there is no denying the deep and upsetting emotions a marital partner's infidelity elicits in his or her mate. Anger, insecurity, and feelings of rejection all are evinced. Dr. Allen Wheelis (1975), a psychiatrist, states:

There is nothing so devastating as finding out that the person you are in love with has betrayed you or lied to you. (p. 62)

It is always a choice, therefore, between the sizzling moment versus the painful aftermath whenever adultery is being contemplated.

This point seems obvious. Yet so many of the people I interviewed for this study missed this very obvious fact, and for a good reason: If you can manage to minimize, deny, or trivialize the pain you will be inflicting on your spouse by having an affair, then it will be that much easier to have one. If you can somehow cleverly delude yourself into believing that having an affair will not really hurt your husband or your wife, then you are apt to have a much less guilt-ridden time.

There are, I have observed, two ways men on the verge of having affairs gloss over their wives' inevitable pain. They either tell themselves that having an affair has nothing to do with their wives--that it has absolutely no connection to what they are feeling about their marriages--or they vow never to tell their wives.

In the Anger Obstacle chapter of this dissertation, I presented an interview with a Los Angeles theatrical agent. The second portion of my interview with him was about his extramarital affairs. Because it very much exemplifies how men delude themselves into thinking their affairs have little, if any, relationship to their marriages, I have

included it here. His marriage, as you may recall, clearly was nose-diving.

My relationship with my wife has nothing to do with my extramarital affairs. See, if you're with a woman because the home scene is bad, then you're doing something else. I'm not looking for other women as a way of getting back at my wife. I don't see that it affects her at all. And this is all relatively new to me. I was absolutely faithful for seven or eight years. I never even kissed another woman. I didn't use to think that you could have both a marriage and outside affairs. I just thought that was the way marriage was. But, you know, things happen.

So whatever problems we've had in our marriage, and God knows there's been plenty, they've had nothing to do with my outside relationships. There are simply various pressures on our relationship that are caused by the fact that two intelligent people came together at the age of twenty-five or twenty-six and now it's fourteen years later. And they've both grown and developed and changed and had children and have gone through a lot of history on the way. That's what causes pressures.

I'm really not very sexually active outside my marriage. I would guess that if you took a survey of all the males who are married, I would end up in the bottom ten percent in terms of the number of times I've had extramarital relationships. I mean, I know married guys who go out casually every night with other women.

This man refused to see that his affairs were even partially triggered by the unhappiness and frustration he was experiencing in his marriage. Many men I interviewed were similarly deluded. Tom, a thirty-five-year-old lawyer, told me this story.

A couple of years ago, I became involved with several women. One of the women was even the wife of a client of mine. I was married at the time--still am--so I thought I'd be tactful and not tell my wife. Why lay a trip on her? My wife didn't

know any of the women. What would telling her about all my sexploits accomplish anyway?

What ended up happening was pretty classic. My wife found a letter at my office one day, a too-intimate letter from one of these women. And that was it. The cat was out of the bag.

Before all my affairs, we had a stillborn. We had one son. But Cheryl really wanted a girl this time. It wiped us both out We then tried to get pregnant as soon as we could but it just wasn't happening. Now I don't know if you know what that's like, trying to get pregnant and it not working. It's physically exhausting, for one thing. You begin to feel like you're a sex machine who has to perform at the drop of a hat. It takes the sex out of sex.

We went to a therapist because things were getting pretty ragged at home. The therapist encouraged us to hang in there. But I knew I wasn't feeling good being at home anymore.

We went back to this same therapist a few weeks after my wife discovered my affairs and a lot of stuff came out. Besides us not getting pregnant, I was starting to feel my age a little. I was balding. Now that's something men don't like to talk much about. You know, they say, "Look how virile a guy like Telly Savalas is." Well, that's a crock. When clumps of your hair fall out, it really puts you through a heavy.

So the affairs didn't come from nowhere. When I first got into being unfaithful, I really didn't put two and two together. But talking to the therapist showed me why I was doing what I was doing.

Like this lawyer, a lot of men mentioned to me that it was necessary to be "tactful" in a relationship. By tactful, they meant it was better to conceal their affairs from their wives. Why burden my wife with something that essentially has nothing to do with her or with our relationship?

What these men did not know, though, was that ninety-nine

out of a hundred times, an affair is an emotional barometer for a marriage. It is an indicator of what is going on between a husband and his wife. It is no coincidence, for example, that the theatrical agent's extramarital affairs began when his marriage started feeling rocky or that the lawyer's affairs began soon after the tragedy of a stillborn child. No coincidence either that according to recent statistics, the likeliest time for a man to have an affair is when his wife is pregnant (Pietropinto, 1981, p. 309). This is when a man is fearing the responsibilities of parenting, when he is afraid of settling into adulthood. It is the time, too, when his wife is turning toward a new love object--the child that is daily growing inside her. As a result, many men feel estranged from their wives during pregnancy, and instead of just talking to their wives about this emotional distance, they turn to extramarital affairs. One woman shared with me her husband's disaffection and adulterous affair during their pregnancy:

I remember thinking Victor was a little strange during the pregnancy. You'd think that a man who was going to have his first child would be absolutely thrilled about it; but by the time I began to show the fact that I was pregnant, Victor was almost embarrassed by it. He used to walk behind me or he didn't walk with me. I should have guessed then that something was happening but I just didn't think about it.

If a man, then, does not see his affairs as somehow being symptomatic of the condition his marriage is in, if he does not see that his extramarital relationships reflect, at least

in some way, on the state of his inner feelings, his marriage is headed for problems.

Honesty as an Antidote to the Fidelity Obstacle

Lying about an affair, of course, is common. For many people, it is second nature, a habit learned early in life: In order for a relationship to work, in order for two human beings to live together at all harmoniously, there are just some things better left unsaid. If we were to be honest, if we were to really tell our spouses just what we thought and felt, then our marriages, many of us are convinced, would explode.

This belief is something a lot of us bring to our love relationships, again, the result of our earliest familial and societal conditioning. Lying, at least white lying, we feel, is an acceptable, even a necessary, survival skill, especially in marriage.

And yet, paradoxically, all of us want to be able to trust our marriages. We want our love relationships to be the one place where we can truly be ourselves. But how can a trust and an openness develop between two people if lying is a built-in component?

The answer is simple. They can't. If we tell a lie or if we conceal a truth from our mate, we are only creating more distance and less trust. And the more secrets we have

from one another, the less intimacy exists in our relationship, and the more separate we feel from each other.

Still, so many of us try to justify our secrets, convincing ourselves that what we are really doing by lying is protecting our mates (and not ourselves) from unnecessary pain. But again--and it is something we all know but something we conveniently forget--we only end up compounding our own pain and our mate's pain by telling a lie or concealing the truth. Dr. Don Jackson (1968) underscores this point:

You must overcome your fear of honesty, because every lie begets another lie. It is always necessary to cover the cover-up. (p. 304)

Besides, our attempts at deception are likely to be unsuccessful anyway. If we are trying to keep a lie from the person we are supposedly closest with in the world, we cannot help but be guarded and unspontaneous. And if our spouses, after all, cannot pick up on these sorts of shifts in our behavior, who can? We are often, therefore, not keeping a lie from our spouses. We are simply colluding with them to keep a painful bit of information out of awareness.

Additional Psychological Dynamics of Fidelity

Extramarital sex is a very volatile subject for any couple. This is because the deepest layers of our emotional lives are inextricably bound to the sexual relationships we

have with our spouses. Nena O'Neill (1977) says:

There is a deep association between sex as a physical act of closeness and our feelings of attachment and affection. As infants, we are held and caressed, soothed and cuddled by our parents, and thus learn to associate physical closeness with love and security Given this and our internalization of traditional expectations for sex with only one person, sexual fidelity is not just a vow in marriage or a moral or religious belief, but a need associated with our deepest emotions and our quest for emotional security. (pp. 87-88)

The Fidelity Obstacle, by jeopardizing our most enduring and emotionally supportive relationships, threatens our most basic needs. And when these basic needs are threatened, the resulting pain can be unbearable.

Summary

The Fidelity Obstacle never totally disappears from a marriage. It swims, either dormant or else much closer to the surface, within both partners. But again, there is a preventive for the potential damages it can wreak. Namely, by being honest in a relationship couples can at least acknowledge the depth of this problem. It does not necessarily have to be, as it so often is, therefore, either the cause or the excuse for wrecking a marriage. But that sort of honesty demands a degree of bravery and trust that too many of us too easily dismiss as unrealistic.

C H A P T E R I X
STRATAGEMS FOR COPING WITH THE OBSTACLES

The Media and its Effects on Men
vis-a-vis Romantic Relationships

Before I actually begin this chapter, I want to say just a few words about marriage; specifically, about how marriage is maligned by the mass media and "pop" culture.

According to David and Leslie Newman (1982), the screenwriters of Superman II, Superman could not be married and remain Superman. Superman could either marry Lois Lane but then have to lose his "superman-ness" in the process; or he could remain Superman but thereby have to forfeit the comforts of married life.

Being Superman and being married just was not possible.

Heroes and marriages obviously do not mix very well in our pop culture. According to the late Professor Marcia Guttentag, former director of the Harvard Project on Women and Mental Health, a research group that studied popular magazines published primarily for male markets, women were nearly always viewed as objects of fantasy, "things" to be conquered and then discarded. External adventures were depicted as the fulfilling experiences for men in these magazines; marriage nearly always seen as an emasculating trap (Scarf, 1980, pp. 5-6). And as David G. Pugh (1983), in his study of several men's magazines noted "marriage is

almost always depicted as stifling domesticity" (p. 18). Pugh goes on to state that in these magazines where a cult of obsessive virility is espoused, heroes are always portrayed as isolates, a throwback to the he-men of the nineteenth century--woodchoppers, whale and bear hunters, Indian fighters, deerslayers. These lone heroes rarely become entangled in the often complex details of long-term, intimate relationships.

Our television heroes, not coincidentally, are usually young cops, each with a stable of attractive but expendable girlfriends. Fighting crime--and not exploring the intricacies of romantic relationships--is their lives' greatest passion: handsome, unmarried workaholics who would really rather pursue a heroin ring than a marriage ring.

Media critic, Jeff Greenfield, writing in an issue of TV Guide (1982), inveighed against the harsh fact that

marriage on television is a cross between a bad joke, a bad dream and a nostalgia trip. Finding a contemporary happily married couple on television is like finding an empty taxi in midtown Manhattan at 5 P.M.--possible, but not very likely. (p. A-11)

And in Leonard Michaels's (1981) best-selling novel, The Men's Club, his main character summarizes this basically cynical view of marriage.

The way relations between people fail, you'd think they get together to break apart and have something to talk about. Nothing to say about a successful relationship, is there? Who would want to listen? . . . As for marriage, it's a still life . . . Doesn't move. You run into an old friend, you shake hands, you say, "What's happening?" He says, "I got married last month."

Your heart sinks. Poor guy. Not only is nothing happening, but he'll soon be miserable. "Wonderful," you say. (p. 27).

Being married, then, is antiheroic in our society. For a man to really be a man, we are subliminally told, he cannot be limited by the humdrum intimacy of married life. And this is not only a prejudice held by men. Though I have not seen research to this extent, I have heard many women bemoan the fact that someone as dynamic, say, as Paul Newman is happily married. They feel cheated somehow, as if so sexy and successful a man should not be taken out of commission by the inevitable restraints of marriage.

Clearly, marriage is antiheroic for men in our culture. Cooking a dinner for his wife, sharing his deepest jealousies, or trying to resolve a knotty problem about his children's schooling are all superfluous to our modern heroes.

Given these societal prejudices, it did not surprise me that most men, when I asked them to assess the successes and failures of their lives, either skipped over or, at best, paid a glib and self-conscious attention to their marriages. Careers, children, net worth, a cabin they built ten years ago with their own hands all took precedence in their self-evaluations.

Despite all the media hype these past fifteen years about the "Me" generation and its intensive emotional explorations, I found that most of the men I interviewed were still

reluctant to talk or to write about their romantic relationships or their marriages. It is rarely the focus of their sharpest facilities.

My own research has shown me, and it has been corroborated by other, more standardized tests (Turk, 1970), that when spouses, especially husbands, speak about their marriages, they generally do not talk about what is really going on in their relationships. Rather, their replies conform to certain traditional models of how a marriage is supposed to work.

The Women's Movement and its Effects on Men
vis-a-vis Romantic Relationships

This reluctance among men to reflect upon their love relationships has been exacerbated in recent years by the fact that a new criterion is being formulated by women for what constitutes a good husband or mate: In the past twenty years, women have made a successful assault on the job market. They have gotten hold of some of the reins of power. As a result, they are now looking much less to marriage and men for financial support. Marriage has shifted, as the psychiatrist Carol Nadelson (1973) points out:

. . . from an emphasis on survival and economic security to a focus on companionship, love, and communication. Self-fulfillment is a value that has superseded the more traditional concerns about family loyalties and responsibilities. (p. 6)

Women now want men to be more than mere wage earners. They want them to be their emotional companions. But the majority of men, unfortunately, have always been (and remain) quiet enemies of emotions, both their own and their wives'.

If there was one recurring theme in all the interviews I conducted with women, it was their need, expressed in almost identical terms, for their lovers and husbands to be more expressive, more tender, more emotional. Non-communicative, quiet, hostile, superficial were adjectives I consistently heard women using to describe their men.

Men need to educate themselves about love relationships. Never having been encouraged or trained to explore the emotional subtleties of these relationships, they have just too often callously exploited or else unknowingly devalued women.

But how are men, given all these societal prejudices and pressures, to suddenly turn their attentions away from their careers and towards their romantic relationships and themselves? Is this a Utopian and airy hope or one that can be accomplished?

Long-Range Stratagems

Preventive psychology and preventive psychiatry offer long-range solutions. If we can begin to inculcate a respect for the role of the husband, or at least a respect for men

who wrestle with the "affairs of the heart," in our youth, then the chances of raising a generation of men more suited to the joys and rigors of marriage will naturally be increased. All forms of media (television, children's books, feature-length movies, music) need to reassess the cool, macho, unemotional, unflappable role they have cast men into and hopefully offer more enlightened role models. This, of course, is asking a lot of our media. In addition, a greater respect for the tenderness and nurturance of women would facilitate the sort of value changes I believe are needed in this area.

From an educational standpoint, workshops on romantic relationships (offered at the high school and college levels) would provide useful and identity-forming services. A few such programs have already been instituted; the television news show, Sixty Minutes, featuring a special last year on one such program in a Chicago high school. But these remain, by and large, only pioneering efforts. Romantic relationships, then, need to be presented to our young people as "serious business," not as frivolous ventures. The potential joys of these relationships, too, need to be spoken about to our youth. Romantic relationships, as much as our careers and our earning powers, determine our level of happiness, productivity, and self-esteem. To not discuss them throughout our formal educational process is simply to relegate them in our children's minds to an inferior

position. If we want our children to navigate these relationships with some measure of aplomb and integrity, then it is up to both parents and educators alike to offer more structured learning opportunities for these oft-times neglected areas.

Admittedly, these are long-range and visionary prescriptions. As for dealing more immediately with this problem (namely, the problem of how to encourage grown men to value and develop communication skills, to face and work with their inner fears and doubts, and to value honesty), I can offer a number of slightly more short-range suggestions.

Additional Stratagems

Bibliotherapy, the use of the written word as a therapeutic device, is, I believe, crucial. Men need to educate themselves about these relationships, about the potentially frightening and unhinging obstacles they will be encountering in the course of romantic relationships. Books, preferably honest, lucid accounts of how other men negotiated these obstacles, can prove very helpful. Currently, the best of this sort of writing is to be found in magazine articles, especially the "About Men" section of the Sunday New York Times Magazine. Book-length manuscripts, unfortunately, are practically non-existent (Daniel Bell's The Paradox of Masculinity, published by the Stephen Green Press, and

William Nolan's Crisis Time, published by Dodd Mead), representing the best of this fledgling genre.

The women's movement spawned a plethora of confessional, autobiographical writings; books that incorporated psychological insight with personal reflection. Hopefully, men will begin to write, as well as read, these sorts of first-person accounts.

The use of psychotherapists and marriage counselors during unwieldy crises also needs to be encouraged (again by the mass media). Men are too often resistant to any form of outside help. They often feel narcissistically wounded if their wives or lovers even suggest the possibility. They also, of course, feel threatened, emotionally threatened, that a therapist will make them confront long-buried conflicts. The "therapy-resistant" male, of course, is a well-known inhabitant of both the family therapy and psychoanalytic literatures. He is usually portrayed as a rigid, fault-finding, emotionally distant autocrat who deigns to enter therapy. This portrait, it has been my experience both as a researcher and as a clinician, is unfortunately too often accurate.

Self-Examination: The Keys to Overcoming the Six Obstacles

How can a man begin to look at his own loneliness, anxiety, fears, and legitimate suffering? How can he begin

to dismantle his deeper, more wobbly self without too abruptly toppling his well-honed persona--the image he presents to both the world and to himself. It is this task, this journey of self-exploration, that is, I believe, a man's most potent tool in confronting the inevitable psychological obstacles related to romantic relationships.

Firstly, this process is a developmental one, a matter of evolutionary adaptation requiring willingness to risk and openness to challenge (Peck, 1978). It is not a two-week crash course in self-knowledge, but an often slow, sometimes painful examination of the ideas and feelings provoked by various life experiences. A certain degree of angst, marital discord, or career setback can launch this sort of process, this introspective journey.

Conducted slowly and with an experienced guide (a seasoned psychotherapist), the journey need not dramatically upset a man's outer life. Certainly, it will change the appearance of the outer life. But again, that change need not be cataclysmic.

The journey, too, can be made without a psychotherapist. Essentially, this inner struggle or process of growth, is always made alone. Those who help us along the way (a therapist, a friend, a wife) offer support, courage, companionship. But, in the end, there is really no way around the basically solitary nature of this task. As George and Nena O'Neill (1972) state:

No matter how much we care for another we cannot do their inner growing for them. In caring, we become enabling factors in one another's growth, but most of the actual work of growth we must undertake on our own. Each person must work through his own style of self-development. (pp. 79-80)

How to begin this process? How can a man start on his journey of self-examination? If a man feels, even for a brief moment, some small flutter of inner shakiness--some uncertainty, say, when his wife or girlfriend recounts to him a triumph of hers at work or just reports that her life feels full--then very possibly this can be his first step, his entranceway into the more vulnerable parts of himself. Men need to look at these kinds of moments in their relationships, these moments when they feel either vaguely or acutely threatened.

If a man can then earnestly look at these fragile parts of himself without rationalizing them away, or ignoring them, or else inflicting them on his wife, he will have started on his journey of self-development and self-exploration.

These long denied parts of himself (e.g., his fear of dependency, his feelings of jealousy, his inability to express tenderness) will, of course, all feel unwieldy, even monstrous at first. It is always frightening when a man first glimpses these weaknesses in himself. But as he slowly gets used to examining them and not running away from them, they will begin to lose their bite.

This process of self-examination adds solid muscle to a man's inner core: By reclaiming the lost and vulnerable

parts of himself, he starts filling in his inner emptiness.

In the past ten years or so, it has become a little too easy to be flippant about this whole process of self-examination. A lavish smorgasbord of therapeutic slogans have flooded into over everyday speech during these years; and what has happened is these slogans have replaced the hard work, the genuine struggle of inner exploration. Instead of sincerely trying to wrestle with these painful issues, many men now just spew mass-produced slogans: I need my space . . . It's just not happening between us . . . Things got too heavy.

A lot of the men I interviewed for this study felt content to stop their inner explorations with these sorts of statements. Countless psychotherapists, too, mentioned this fact to me: That their male clients often conveniently danced along the surface of their deepest torments by employing these shibboleths and slogans of the "Human Potential Movement."

A Brief Critique of Related Short-Term Psychotherapeutic Interventions

This journey of self-exploration is not a short-term answer to the too often tumultuous romantic relationships men perceive themselves to be in. In the final analysis, I believe there to be no really effective short-term measures. Unless accompanied by on-going and painstaking introspection,

and attempts to new behaviors and interpersonal skills, short-range psychotherapeutic interventions are doomed to failure. James J. Barrell and Anne C. Richards (1982), professors in Psychology at West Georgia College, concur. They even believe that short-term counseling techniques can have

some serious and damaging side-effects so far as our relationships with the world around us are concerned. They can result in our isolating ourselves in some rather arbitrary ways from other human beings, or accepting things that have little likelihood of being true. (p. 44)

Rational Emotive Therapy is a case-in-point. Its main proponent (Ellis, 1972) suggests that we are all responsible for whatever negative feelings we harbor regarding our romantic relationships. We are responsible, Ellis claims, because we interpret what occurs to us in particular ways. To avert these negative feelings (may they be jealousy, anger, fear of dependence), we simply have to reappraise or reinterpret the feelings and situations that initially provoked them. This stop-gap strategy, however, as Barrell and Richards (1982) suggest "will run the risk of making us emotionally flat, or unable to live life in its fullness" (p. 43).

The inner battle every man faces is the battle with his unique history and with his inner emptiness or anxiety. And this inner emptiness, as I have conceptualized it, is nothing other than a man's being out of touch with his emotions--with his feelings of tenderness, vulnerability, and compassion.

Now it is very difficult for a man to move beyond these feelings of inner emptiness and into the more real and more vulnerable parts of himself. Again, it requires this very special sort of journey, one generally involving a long and sometimes painful process of self-reflection.

In the earliest stages of a love relationship, a man does not really have to start on that journey. He can, for a while anyway, still get away with not having to operate from his more truthful and vulnerable depths. Because he is being appreciated and admired, and sometimes even idealized by a woman during these early stages of love, he is able to feel on top of things. There is no need for him to examine his harder-to-look-at layers.

Unfortunately, too many men just want to stop things at this point. They want to be adored by women. They want to be admired. Beyond that, though--beyond these initial flattering moves of a relationship and into the more vulnerable terrains any intimate relationship must enter--many men do not want to go. Many men, in fact, once they do get this sort of admiration from a woman, quickly lose interest in the relationship.

These men, filled either with an arrogantly inflated sense of their own "specialness," or else with a gnawing sense of their own inner emptiness, are unable to value anyone who genuinely values them. They end up, therefore, moving from one relationship to the next, callously

disappointing several women in the process. Afraid there is no emotionally pulsating center in their beings, or else afraid that what is pulsating just below their "pseudo-selves" is some grotesque cesspool of pent-up rage, obsessive sexuality, and infantile dependency, many men opt to let sleeping dogs lie. It almost seems better, they tell themselves, to live with a gnawing sense of emptiness than to start wrestling with long-buried emotional obstacles: By rapidly pursuing a career, or else by some warped Holy Grail search for peak sexual experiences, these men choose to never deal with their more vulnerable and initially more frightening depths.

Too many men, as a result, take from women what they cannot give to themselves--a self-love, a genuine acceptance of themselves. And too many men are very adept at seductively eliciting this sort of admiration and respect from women. But in the end, if a man does not struggle to give this gift to himself, then his romantic relationships can only be short-lived and convulsive.

The Journey of Self-Exploration seen from the Psychoanalytic Perspective

In previous sections of this dissertation, I have briefly employed a few of the basic conceptualizations of psychoanalytic theory (specifically, object relations theory) and family systems thinking. Because these theoretical

frameworks can now help further elucidate the exact nature of this "journey"--this process of self-examination that I have been espousing in this chapter--some additional theoretical material is useful.

Romantic relationships are complicated phenomena. Writing about their complexity, Lewis Wolberg (1967), a psychoanalyst has commented:

You relate to your mate in various ways, on multiple levels. You relate as a sexual partner, as a peer, as an authority figure, as a symbol of a parent, as a child, as a projection of yourself and your idealized self-image. (p. 38)

Sigmund Freud revealed just how complex our romantic relationships can be. Freud said that our love lives do not just begin when we meet the person we eventually end up marrying. Our love lives, he explained, begin in infancy. As Dr. Karl Menninger (1942), a celebrated follower of Freud's, says:

The child begins to express its love life in the first days of existence. Using all the organs of his body, he attaches himself with pleasure to a succession [of people] in response to the satisfactions they offer and afford him. His mother, his father, later his brothers and sisters, still later his playmates and teachers, and finally his adult companions, become successive foci of the direction of his love. Conflicts and rivalries develop, and certain patterns of solution are arrived at, primarily based on his earliest experiences, which usually, of course, involve his mother and father. (p. 261)

"How we love," therefore, is a very complicated and life-long process; our earliest interactions with our parents having reverberations in how we conduct the romantic

attachments we later form as adults.

Several psychoanalytic/psychodynamic thinkers have attempted to atomize the earliest psychological developments of human beings and then offer reconstructive speculation as to how these developments (their successful or unsuccessful negotiation) can influence our adult capacity to love. Margaret Mahler (Mahler, Pine, and Bergman, 1975), through an integration of developmental and psychoanalytic perspectives, has mapped out what she terms the "psychological birth of the infant." Within this framework, a schemata based on the gradations of attachment of the infant to its mother or primary caretaker, Mahler examines the processes of separation-individuation. She divides this process into four subphases:

1. Differentiation
2. Practicing
3. Rapprochement
4. Consolidation of individuality with the beginnings of emotional object constancy.

Separation-individuation, Mahler et al. (1975) posits, is preceded by two other phases: autistic and symbiotic. This autistic phase is typified by the infant acting as if in isolation to others, while the symbiotic phase is an extension outwards, an extension that includes the mother (as if she were simply another part of the infant).

Mahler constantly speaks about "good-enough mothering" as the key to infants successfully traversing these various stages. By this, she means a mother who makes

active adaptation to the infant's needs, an active adaptation that gradually lessens, according to the infant's growing ability to account for failure of adaptation and to tolerate the results of frustration. (pp. 11-12)

If "good-enough mothering" is present (thus enabling the child to gain a rudimentary sense of independence), then the development of an ego can begin. This process of ego-development is synonymous to Mahler's separation-individuation schemata.

Initially, the child breaks away from its mother (subphases of differentiation and practicing). Then, afterwards, the child must come to terms with the ambivalence accompanying this separation (subphase of rapprochement). For it is in these latter stages of "psychological birth" where the issue of fear of loss of love emerges most dramatically. Successfully negotiating this stage of psychological development is tantamount to attaining the ability to simultaneously experience feelings of love and anger toward the increasingly autonomous mother. This ability to experience such ambivalence is a prerequisite to mature object relations.

Mahler's fourth subphase--attainment of individuality and object constancy--is certainly the crowning achievement of these early developmental processes. It is in this subphase where the child can finally internalize a "constant, positively cathected, inner image of the mother" (p. 93). Without this ability, Mahler states, reality testing, ego

development, and the capacity to love cannot proceed.

The capacity to love is developed in these earliest psychological processes and then further refined and augmented through the phallic, latency and genital stages of development. These various phases of attachment and ego development in childhood have, according to psychoanalytic theorists, potentially profound implications for how we later on create intimate relationships as adults. Faulty object relations, the result of "not good-enough mothering" during these crucial stages, results, simply stated, in tumultuous adult relationships. If our psychological foundations are shaky, then we may find ourselves schizoid, over dependent, fused, forever enraged, and/or pathologically jealous in adult romantic involvements.

It is not in the scope of this dissertation to further elaborate on precisely how faulty childhood rearing impacts on our ability to form mature genital and emotional relations. But because each partner brings into a romantic relationship their own psychological heritage that has characterized his or her unique psychological development and because this heritage can so powerfully impact on the quality of a given relationship, it seems imperative for mates and spouses to conduct some sort of serious process of self-examination.

Recent research into the male gender (Rochlin, 1980) bemoans the fact that Mahler's work appears to ignore gender

issues: that is, her theories are about "babies and mothers," not about "boy babies and their mothers" and "girl babies and their mothers" (p. 8-11). Rochlin appears to be urging future researchers to develop a psychology of boyhood and masculinity; one that would deal more specifically with the differences between the separation-individuation processes of boys and girls. This type of research would certainly add to our speculations about the etiology of several of the psychological obstacles examined in this dissertation.

Additional Complications to this Journey of Self-Exploration

Adding further to all this complexity, as family therapists are wont to point out, is the interactional task every married or engaged couple needs to negotiate with the world-at-large. As if it was not enough for two people to figure out how to have a cooperative relationship, they also must gracefully weave their relationship into the complex web of each of their social lives. Parents, friends, work associates, children, and in some cases, children from previous marriages, all need to be dealt with.

This can be a very difficult maneuver. It involves, as the noted structural family therapist, Salvador Minuchin (1974) explains:

Creating a boundary around the couple that's permeable enough to allow in the outside world

(parents, friends, career, etc.) but that's not so permeable that it can be flooded by the outside world. (p. 43)

Again, a very difficult balancing act.

Clearly, learning how to be cooperative in a marriage is a multi-levelled operation. Partly, it is a process of winnowing through all the interactional subtleties that go on between spouses and their social networks; partly, too, it is more an intrapsychic process with each individual exploring his or her unique psychological blocks (the result of early and continuing childhood conditioning) that prevent real marital harmony. It is in these struggles where we try to make peace with the psychological obstacles I have delineated in this dissertation.

CHAPTER X

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Brief Summary

In this dissertation, I have attempted to explore some of the emotional obstacles men report experiencing in their romantic relationships. Each person I spoke with, to varying degrees of intensity and to varying degrees of awareness, mentioned traversing the six terrains I outlined. From this, it would seem that every couple, at some point in their lives, grapples with the issues of dependency, autonomy, anger, jealousy, infidelity, and the complex logistics of finding time to be together.

I tried to make clear from my interview data that many relationships become either stuck or unglued at one or a combination of these emotional obstacles. My data bore this out; many of the men I interviewed sharing with me that their relationships became difficult and knotty because of these various obstacles. Some couples, for example, seemingly play out--for a lifetime--their autonomy/dependency battles. Other couples reported capsizing or else angrily treading water in the turbulent currents of the Jealousy Obstacle. Still other relationships appeared to succumb to a knotty combination of all these obstacles.

Some of the obstacles seem to be most active when a man and a woman first meet. Others reportedly intensify once the question of marriage arises. Still others activate only after a couple has married. But regardless of when each of these issues most acutely affects a couple, if a man can identify and befriend them, then it appears--from both the interview data and the literature on couples--that his romantic relationships (and, later on, his marriage) can thrive. But if he chooses to ignore them, loving relationships with members of the opposite sex just will be a conflictual part of his journey through life.

Again, what is hopefully clear by now is the author's position that if lovers do not attain some genuine resolution, some genuine reconciliation with each of these very difficult issues, then they will probably have to battle them, either covertly or overtly, for the rest of their lives. But if a couple can wrestle with and come to some acceptable terms with these often painful issues, then they will become stronger and more loving marital partners.

In the end, it appears most men do not really have a choice whether or not to start on this journey. We are all thrust onto it, onto the possibility of encountering these various obstacles, the moment we meet someone we feel special about. These obstacles, it seems, simply make themselves known to us in the course of any long-term romantic relationship.

As I pointed out, our culture, but especially its men, understand very little about emotional intimacy. What it does understand, or with what it is most preoccupied, is sex. Indeed, there has never been a society in the history of the world that has been so explicit and so preoccupied with the dance of sexual mating (May, 1975, p. 82).

The "real" gold, I have tried to stress in my own ideas regarding male-female relationships, can be more than the formation of a sexual connection. It can be the formation of an intimate and emotionally meaningful one. But again, a common practice in our day, as the well-known psychologist Rollo May (1975) points out:

is to avoid working up the courage required for authentic intimacy by shifting the issue to the body, making it a matter of simple physical courage. It is easier in our society to be naked physically than to be naked psychologically or spiritually, easier to share our body than to share our fantasies, hopes, fears, and aspirations, which are felt to be more personal and the sharing of which is experienced as making us more vulnerable. For curious reasons we are shy about sharing the things that matter most. (p. 119)

Many men have become fixated at the body levels of intimacy--at sexual conquests and sexual performance--because the next levels of the dance of intimacy are just too frightening. These levels, with their inner obstacles, are, many feel, better left unexplored.

It is clearly very difficult to get people, but especially men, with their oftentimes monomaniacal careerist ambitions, to take a long and deep look at their

relationships and at themselves. But being embroiled in an unrelenting twenty-five-year battle with a spouse, or constantly having to maneuver to avoid one another, takes great skill and wherewithal: As much, if not more effort than trying to honestly deal with your problems.

It is my view that our romantic relationships, very briefly, are part of a lifelong process of perfecting ourselves--a process we either consciously respect and embrace or one we unconsciously squander away. Dr. Robert Seidenberg (1973), a practicing psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, succinctly expresses this view of marriage:

Marriage offers the major opportunity for personal and mutual growth that life provides. Only in marriage is one likely to experience the day-in-day-out confrontation with oneself through another. Not only one's integrative capacity but one's sanity is constantly tested in trying to determine what is fair or not.

The everyday give-and-take that a marriage involves is the best testing ground for growth. It's a most precious opportunity for getting to know what and who one really is. How generous, how tolerant, how unselfish, how brilliant one really is A man cannot be truly mature until he has been confronted with, and deals with, and hopefully masters, the painful exigencies of living to which the marital state alone is heir. (p. 22)

It is in our romantic relationships, therefore, where there is hope for all of us. If we can "get it together" in these relationships, then we can get it together anywhere else, for these intimate relationships present us with the most profound and most intense confrontations any of us have with our darkest and lightest sides.

Just how gracefully or how brutally we negotiate these relationships is, in the end, determined by nothing less than the degree to which we have understood ourselves and our fellow human beings.

Implications for Future Research

I have explored six seemingly recurring psychological obstacles men experience in romantic relationships in this dissertation. Studies designed to yield educational tools for teaching high school and college-level students about these--what appear to be--predictable crises of romantic relationships need to be initiated. Again, young people need to be educated about these oftentimes treacherous relationships. How best to educate our youth about intimate relationships is a crucial and fertile research area.

My own predilection for honest, first-person accounts by men about their experiences in romantic relationships compels me to urge future researchers in this direction. Qualitative research methods offer the opportunity to uncover progressively more complex subtleties vis-a-vis romantic relationships. In addition, men, often emotionally cut off from other men, need to know they are not alone in these struggles. Quantitative methods can be helpful. But they can never replace the need for qualitative studies in these complex areas.

From a psychotherapeutic perspective, future studies focusing on men and their inability to embrace their emotional selves are needed. Articles in professional journals rarely appear that treat the specific issues men confront in creating and sustaining romantic relationships, as well as psychotherapeutic alliances. I suspect, too, many of the psychological obstacles I enumerated in this dissertation can be helpful to psychotherapists in their attempts to understand the needs and pacing of their male clients.

Women, because they are generally easier to interview about emotional issues, have been the focus of several studies about romantic relationships. But future researchers need to focus their attention on men and romantic relationships. My hope for this dissertation is that it will be a springboard in this direction.

The Findings of this Study vis-a-vis Other Researchers

A considerable amount of research has been done in the area of marriage, research focusing specifically on men and their role in marriage; Jessie Bernard (1972), for example, effectively documenting that men traditionally find marriage more emotionally rewarding than women. And women's literature spawned from the Women's Liberation Movement has additionally examined such issues as men and rape in marriage

and male fantasies about pornography (Friedman, Sarah, 1982). But as pointed out in the Review of Literature section of this study, there has been much less written about what really transpires in a romantic relationship. As Carl Rogers (1972) explains:

I know that you can find out anything you want to know about the externals of marriage and partnership. You can find out the differences in male-female sexual needs and timing. You can read books on how to improve the sex act. You can study the history of marriage. You can read lists, compiled from questionnaires, of the major sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction in married couples--and on and on and on. We are inundated by data. But rarely do we discover a true picture of what a partnership is like, as perceived and lived and experienced from the inside. (p. 2)

Even rarer is the existence of specific research honing into the conflicts men experience in these intimate relationships. So-called "Pop Psychology" has spawned a handful of books in recent years, book attempting to understand why men fail to be suitable emotional mates for women (Kiley, 1984; Carey, 1984). These too often derivative and/or superficial works aside, the other source of insight into men's psychological conflicts in romantic relationships (other than the psychoanalytic and systems theorists already outlined in Chapter II of this study) are works by and about women vis-a-vis romantic relationships (Beauvior, 1949; Castillejo, 1973; Friday, 1977; Lazarre, 1978; Scarf, 1980; West, 1977). Writing both from clinical and personal observations, these works offer speculation as to how men's experience might be similar or different from women's

experiences in romantic relationships. Throughout this study, this researcher has acknowledged and periodically analyzed these works.

The design of this study, then, in the simple fact that it attempted to derive men's conflicts in romantic relationships, hopefully adds information to an obvious gap in the literature on romantic relationships. It is this researcher's belief, too, that the second phase of this study, namely, the fleshing out of these already demarcated obstacles, adds some fresh insights into a presently meager and fledgling literature. Each of the obstacles, as this researcher tried to make clear in Chapter II of this study, had been examined by the psychoanalytic and systems literatures; this study being very clearly rooted in both these bodies of knowledge. But the use of the subjective face-to-face interview as a data pool hopefully helps add to the existing understanding on how these obstacles actually function in men. The subtle hydraulics, for example, of how a man distances himself from a woman in the early phases of a romantic relationship (Chapter III) and the descriptions of how the Time Obstacle corrodes a long-term relationship, are, it is this researcher's hope, unique, useful contributions.

Final Conclusions

After interviewing three hundred men, I began to notice certain recurring stumbling blocks that inevitably--in relationship after relationship--got in the way of love. These were recurring obstacles that prevented men from emotionally giving to women.

Every man's "love journey" is menaced by these same obstacles; all that ever seemed to vary in different men's lives was the degree of each obstacle's ferocity. This larger perspective, this knowledge that all men apparently wrestle with these same "demons" hopefully will help to make each man's individual struggles less painful.

For all its emotional upheavals, for all its unhinging confusions, the men in my study helped show that love--that seemingly formless process whereby two people develop a true caring for one another--is at least partially understandable. Specifically, the forming of an intimate and meaningful love relationship can be viewed as a series of confrontations or battles with six very stubborn emotional obstacles. And it is this writer's belief that it is in the process of overcoming these six obstacles where true love is both forged and sustained.

These six emotional obstacles can be seen as what keeps us from our more playful and loving selves. They can be powerful inner dynamics which prevent us from creating truly

intimate relationships. And, as I said earlier in this dissertation, women suffer with them. But it is my perception that men are more often strangled and struck dumb by them.

It has been ascertained by social psychologists that when people are asked what they remember as the happiest time of their lives, they inevitably include the first years of a new relationship. According to the sociologist Jessie Bernard (1972),

There is the joy of having found each other, the enhancement of self by interaction with the other; the glow of mutual appreciation. Disenchantment has not yet reached great depths, and the novelty of the new relationship casts a halo over everything.
(p. 19)

These years naturally have their torments. But there is a newness, a "blanket of love" during this period of a relationship that enables these inevitable obstacles to be dealt with. It might be concluded that if these obstacles are acknowledged early on and dealt with during these first years of a relationship, then the chance of creating a healthy emotional foundation--one that will serve the relationship well for whatever difficult times lie ahead--will be maximized. But if these obstacles go unheeded, the likelihood of the relationship surviving life's vicissitudes will be seriously diminished.

These obstacles, or more precisely, how casually most men wrestle with them (and in some cases, simply deny them), appear to be the cause of all the familiar complaints women

have about men; complaints women have so openly been voicing these past ten years: Men do not know how to communicate their emotions. Men are preoccupied with their careers, with money, or with power. Men are not spontaneously giving. Men see us only as sexual objects, not as individuals.

Clearly, evidence in a variety of areas shows it is time for men to start taking their romantic lives more seriously: time for men to start knowing that women have other functions in romantic relationships than to serve as mirrors for men, reflecting them at twice their actual size.

In the late 1930s, Havelock Ellis (1938), the famous psychoanalyst wrote:

The marriage questions today is much less the wife-problem than the husband problem. There has been no marked change of responsive character in the activities of men. (p. 197)

Forty years after Ellis wrote those words, the situation unfortunately remains the same.

The existence of problematic human relationships, and especially the too frequently bitter and corrosive interactions in love relationships, is no matter of chance. As Michael Sperling (1983) points out,

Loving is a learned behavior which is far more difficult to master than is commonly acknowledged, yet which is necessary if man is to overcome his essential separateness from man. (p. 25)

All of us, then, but especially men, need to attend to our romantic lives.

Erich Fromm (1956) refers to loving as an art and

commented that "most people see the problem of love primarily as that of being loved, rather than that of loving, of one's capacity to love" (p. 1). Hopefully, this dissertation will aid men and women alike in both developing and refining these crucial capacities.

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A P P E N D I X A

DEMOGRAPHIC MATERIAL ABOUT RESEARCH SAMPLE

As with my first sample of seventy interviews, this next sample (consisting of two-hundred-and-thirty men) represented a wide cross-section. Again, if annual income (gross income) is the determinant to "class," sixty-five percent of my sample were "middle class," that is, men making annual incomes between \$18,000 and \$40,000. Fifteen percent of the men I interviewed earned more than \$40,000 per year; six percent, of course, earned less than \$18,000 per year.

The bulk of the sample were between the ages of twenty-four and thirty-nine (seventy-three percent). Approximately half the men interviewed were married; another thirty-five percent in the midst of an on-going romantic relationship; the remaining fifteen percent not presently involved in an intimate, romantic relationship.

Over three-quarters of the men interviewed were Caucasian (thirty percent, Roman Catholic; thirty-five percent, Jewish; thirty percent, Protestant; five percent, unidentified). Twenty percent of the sample were Black, the remaining two-to-three percent Hispanic.

Again, there was no intentional choice in my sampling.

A P P E N D I X B

CONSENT FORM

I agree to participate in a study, conducted by Steve Berman, concerning the nature of romantic relationships.

I understand that neither my name, nor the name of my place of employment will be identified in this study.

Signature

Date

A P P E N D I X C
INTERVIEW GUIDE QUESTIONS

1. In your intimate relationships with women, do you ever experience a fear of losing your independence?
no _____ yes _____
Describe _____
2. Do you ever experience a fear of becoming desperately dependent on a woman?
no _____ yes _____
Describe _____
3. Do you consider anger and jealousy difficult obstacles for you in your relationships with women?
no _____ yes _____
Describe _____
4. Is time a factor in your relationship with women? Do you find yourself, for instance, deprioritizing your relationship with a lover or a spouse for the sake of your career or a hobby?
no _____ yes _____
Describe _____
5. Is monogamy an issue for you in your intimate relationships with women?
no _____ yes _____
Describe _____
6. Are there any additional obstacles or problems you experience in your closest relationships with women, issues we haven't yet discussed?
no _____ yes _____
Describe _____

